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N T H A N D A   L I Z Z I E   M A N D U W I

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BY THE  
*END*  
OF YOUR  
*TEENS*



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ALL I WISH I COULD HAVE KNOWN WHEN I WAS A TEENAGER.  
*LUCKY YOU.*

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**BY  
THE END  
OF YOUR TEENS**

**Nthanda Lizzie Manduwi**



For my momma, “the writer”, I never stopped writing.

To my daddy, “the reader”, I will keep reading.

By The End of Your Teens

Nthanda Lizzie Manduwi

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## PREFACE

So here you are, at the end of your teens. You are nowhere near where and who you want to be, and that is perfectly all right. Better than all right, in fact. You have forever and a long way to go. Life begins here, and do brace for it. It will hit you before you know it.

This book is about you. It covers all I wish I could have known when I was a teenager. This is my story laced with all the knowledge I've earned throughout my teens and in my early 20s. I wrote this book while discovering myself and tapping into depths of my being.

Today you are equipped with some knowledge for a better tomorrow. Oh! Darling, I wish you the best. Remember to always take one day at a time in future. Be gentle with yourself, be patient with yourself. You are doing all right, just all right.

I am grateful to all the people who helped in the creation of this book - My sister, my partner and my best friends - I love you and you mean everything to me.

This book is not only for teens, but for everyone in need of some personal growth. I found myself writing this book; I hope you find yourself reading it.

All My Love,

Nthanda

## **PART 1: THE SELF**

*SELF LOVE AND HEALING*

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*GOD (THE UNIVERSE)*

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*HEALTH AND FITNESS*

*SUCCESS AND DISCIPLINE*

*TIME AND MONEY MANAGEMENT*

*BALANCE AND INDEPENDENCE*



Sharing your story  
is basically you saying:  
“Here are my mistakes.  
Do better than I did.”  
Lusungu Jonazi



Think of yourself as a computer program.

You were developed in the particular way you are by everything you have encountered, everyone you have met, and everything you have been through. You were programmed that way to survive a world you did not understand. You were taught everything you know by your parents, your family, your friends, your teachers, strangers, and most times, circumstances.

Now that you are a little older, give yourself permission to unlearn what you think you know. Give yourself a chance to develop your own uninfluenced personal views and values. Detach yourself from everything you have learnt. Step outside of your own beliefs. Allow yourself to be wrong and/or biased for the first time. Suspend everything you have learnt back into the universe where it came from. Critique your view while standing on the outside. Question everything and overanalyse the little things. Crosscheck your values. Ask yourself why you believe in that thing so strongly. Question, question, and question!

Hold on to the values that still make sense, and let go those that don't. Learn new things. Give yourself room to grow. We call this process - relearning.

Welcome to growing up.





PART 1:  
THE  
SELF



## Chapter 1. SELF LOVE AND HEALING

*“No such thing as a life that’s better than yours.”*

- ***Jermaine Lamarr Cole***

Self-love. We hear about it everywhere we go. It is the new order of the day. Everyone is talking about it – the preachers, the motivational speakers, the poets, the musicians, your parents and everyone around you. ‘Love yourself’, ‘Love your life’. There is so much positive talk, I wish I were you growing up in this day. You are so lucky, I wish you knew.

I have met so many people beyond 20, at times even 30, who are still broken; who never learnt how to heal in their teens or sometime before that. I am surely hopeful that you will lose and find yourself in this book simultaneously. This is all about you, and after reading ‘By the end of your teens,’ I want you to be able to say “I love myself.” You should also be able to acknowledge that “this book might as well be a handbook about self-love - I needed it.” Therefore it is only right that we start with a few motivational quotes to set the tone, am I right?

*“Darling it isn’t selfish to remember yourself.”*

- ***Karen Owusu***

*“Do not forget to fall in love with yourself first”*

- ***Carrie Bradshaw***

*“It is not selfish to love yourself, take care of yourself and to make yourself a priority. It is necessary.”*

- ***Mandy Hale***

*“I am working on myself, for myself, by myself.”*

- ***Unknown***

*“It is not your job to like me. It is mine.”*

- ***Byron katie***

*“Love yourself enough to take the actions required for your happiness. Love yourself enough to cut yourself loose from the ties of a drama-filled past. Love yourself enough to move on.”*

- ***Dr. Steve Marabolli***

I could go on; probably, I should. You see, I do not think enough can ever be said about self-love. Every time I hear someone preach about loving themselves, I find myself cheering “Yaaas!” - Silently, at times loudly in the background even when it makes me very uncomfortable.

### ***Self-Love and the Human Problem***

Watching someone go through the process of self-love itself is unnerving. It feels uncomfortable and yet comforting watching people accepting things about themselves which they were uncomfortable with before.

Most people are afraid to be themselves, for fear of being judged by society. They try so hard to fit into what society says humans should be. You find so many people conforming to behavioural, religion, dressing, beauty and so many more standards – simply because society says it should be so. What this entails is that you

become less and less of your most authentic self. For most people, this puts a lot of pressure on them and sometimes makes them unhappy.

Self-acceptance is saying “With all due respect, my body, my behaviour, my beliefs, my face, my flaws, and my way of doing thing are perfectly fine, without any influence of yours”. This in itself is a form of rebellion and will obviously lead to some sense of rejection by some people.

If the process one goes through is very thorough, they will most likely be dealing with personal issues that make both them and society uncomfortable. I remember everything I went through when I was accepting myself. It involved convincing myself that it is all right to wear pants and short skirts even when I have bowlegs. Many times I had to stand up for my opinions and beliefs while at the same time try to respect other people’s views. I had to accept many aspects of my life that I once was insecure about, for fear of being judged.

The more you accept yourself, the more you begin to honour the principle of “agreeing to disagree”. You get in a space where you can accept that we don’t always have to be right in the perception of others, and that it is perfectly fine to differ in opinions without the need to argue.

Society puts so much pressure on what and how we should be such that it takes time to re-establish yourself and be able to say “No, I am okay the way that I am.” Such issues normally bear on societal expectations, as such, they are normally done as a way of

coming out to society. As a bystander, you go through mixed feelings. You feel pity, love, and shame for the person, at the same time, you feel comfort, pride and respect for the person for having so much courage to become their truest self.

I remember the first time I heard about self-love, I thought;

*'This means you have searched the whole world, you have looked everywhere for someone to love you, and you have failed to find anyone to love you; so much so that now, you must just love yourself.'*

The idea of a person loving themselves did not sound very well to me at first. I did not want to believe I was unlovable. I wanted to believe I deserved love, love from an external source. I had not really taken time to think about what that really meant, I just wanted to believe I was worthy of someone else's love.

Then I realised that all the messages we had been preaching to all the people we claim to love – *'have a higher self-esteem'*, *'be confident in yourself'*, *'accept your flaws'* and more, were all saying one thing – love yourself just a little more. We go on quests looking for people to accept us, people to tell us we are good enough, people to accept our flaws. This is not our fault. From the day we were born, we have been given validation from left, right and centre. Throughout our lives, when we achieved something, people applauded us. From the first words we uttered, the first steps we took, our university graduation day, and maybe even our wedding day – there have been and will be claps all around us. Every little thing we did had to have a reciprocal action. Something as simple as finally being able to grab something as a baby, learning how to sit,

crawl, stand, walk, and more was always applauded by our parents. They are not at fault. They were proud, and they had every right to be. Equally, when we failed to achieve something, we saw the faces of disapproval and disappointment. We did not like that feeling and as such worked hard to make sure we got the applause. We grew up with that mentality and went into the world searching for the same validation; however, this time around, it was not as simple as just achieving something to get the applause. People were less kind. You see, unlike our parents, these people did not naturally love us. These people did not “*own*” us. We had to win them over first, earn their love, and earn their validation so they too can cheer for us. We searched for validation everywhere and yet we forgot about the validation and love we required most – our own. When you can truly applaud yourself, show up for you, be there for you and truly be content with that, outward validation becomes only an option and no longer a need. We survive properly, have high self-esteem, confidence and in all – we love ourselves.

### ***Self-Love Defined***

Self-love as defined by ***Dr. Deborah Khoshaka*** is “a state of appreciation for oneself that *grows from actions* that support our physical, psychological and spiritual growth”. She further explains that, when we act in ways that expand self-love in us, we begin to accept our weaknesses as well as our strengths much better; have less need to explain away our short-comings, have compassion for ourselves as human beings, and when we struggle to find personal

meaning, we centre everything on our life purpose and values, and expect living a fulfilled life through our own efforts.

Self-love is important to living well. It influences who you pick for a mate, the image you project at work, and how you cope with the problems in your life. It is so important to your welfare such that I want you to know how to bring more of it into your life.

We need self-love like we need the air we breathe, the food we eat, everything we do daily in order to survive. It should always be a priority to love yourself - it should never an option. The more you love yourself, the more you are able to give the same abundance of love to those around you.

I remember the first time I experienced self-love; I had reached a low I had never been in my life (we will talk about that a little later). My friend had noticed how low I had been and she decided to drag me to church with her. I remember hearing all those songs about how God sees us. I was 15, completely crushed and on my knees. It was during that moment that for the first time in my life, I came to terms with myself. It was within that moment that I did not need anybody's validation but my own.

It might have been because I was in a church and the thought of a greater power that could not forsake me when everybody else had - that I realised I was the only difference I needed. I recall crying my heart out in that moment, and I did not care who was watching. I prayed and I cried. I think as humans we underestimate the power of tears. I have cried a lot in my life, and I trust in tears



more than anything. I believe tears are a way to release pain, and I believe pain released is better than pain contained.

*“Cry,*

*Let that water go.*

*You were drowning.”*

*- Upile Chisala, Poet*

I remember how they looked at me, as the pain left my body, the pain they had put inside me. I remember their faces, the pity, the love, and the shame. I remember their apologies that followed. It was a day too late, because this moment was about me. I had accepted me, no one else’s validation mattered. This of course did not mean that I was now iron to people’s opinions of me, but that their opinions came second to mine. I was miles away from knowing what that journey would have for me; I know that was the day I took the first step.

***How Do You Love Yourself?***

## **KNOWLEDGE**

To love yourself, first, you must have knowledge about who you are, the world you live in, and the creation and its Creator. How these things affect you and in turn how you react to the universe determine who you are. It is all an unending cycle of actions and reactions.

- 1. Knowledge about God (or a higher power – the universe) and His love for you***

Firstly, you have to understand how great the universe and its Creator are. Secondly, you have to understand how much such a great God loves you. You must truly acknowledge that you are loved. You are loved by many, more than you know but most importantly, you are loved by the Universe – better yet its Creator – the most high God Himself. Once you understand that, once you truly begin to contextualise that, then you can truly begin to love yourself.

Jesus said it himself:

*“As I have loved you, love one another”.*

**- John 13 vs 34**

You see, He loved us first. He had to love, for us to know what love is all about. God is love and He gave Himself to us, so we can get to experience that love. He lives in us, and therefore we embody that love. We are that love.

*“I knew you before I formed you in the womb. I set you apart for me before you were born.”*

**- Jeremiah 1 verse 6**

*“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”*

**- Psalms 139:13-16**

*“But when God, who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace, was pleased.”*

**– Galatians 1 vs 15**

*“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!”*

**– Isaiah 49 vs 15**

*“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart.”*

**– Jeremiah 1 vs 5**

All of these verses are God saying:

*“I loved you first – I loved you, so you may love all men as I have loved you.”*

## **2. Knowledge of the Self**

Here comes the hard part. To love yourself, first, you must have self-knowledge. To do this, you must be absolutely honest with yourself. This may seem like a simple thing to do, but in fact we choose to lie to ourselves even in the simplest of circumstances. We lie to ourselves about all the most important yet problematic aspects of our lives which would take too much energy to change – aspects such as our education, relationships, friendships, health, and habits. We lie because we want to avoid pain. We lie because we want to believe that we are better than we appear to be and we do not wish to feel as inadequate as we really are. The truth about us can feel too risky.

To know ourselves, we must stop lying to ourselves; we must learn to face our realities and deal with every situation as it comes.

Normally when we have issues in our lives or things aren't going according to our plan, we fixate our energies on new things, less important things, to mask our true problems. Here are a few things I learnt that we do to divert our attention from what really is an issue in our lives:

- Distraction/Addiction

We identify things that can distract our minds from what could be bothering us. We hang around people that convince us we are better, lose ourselves in alcohol, drugs, adventures, and many others. We don't really like these things as they are. We like them for their ability to distract us from what is truly important – what we really feel. We continue doing these things and they become addictions.

- Manic Cheeriness

We cover up the sadness with exaggerated happiness. We try our best to stay happy in order to run away from our sadness. We develop a tendency of self-affirmation, convincing ourselves that everything is great, leaving no room for any contrary thought.

- Irritability

We fail to face a person or a certain situation with our anger and this seeps out into everything else we do. We get irritated by the smallest things around us. We keep losing our tempers and our

brains are so cluttered with these annoyances such that there is no space to focus on the real reason we are angry and sad.

- Denigration

We tell to ourselves that we don't care about anything at all – be it politics, love, career or success. We are very particular about our lack of interest to prove to others and ourselves how uninterested we are.

- Censoriousness

**“If you hate a person, you hate something** in him that is part of yourself. What isn't part of ourselves doesn't disturb us,” as Hermann Hesse said. We are deeply judgmental and disapproving of others and their behaviours while not admitting to ourselves that a part of us really likes that element. We attack certain traits because we know that we share them somewhere inside us. We delight when others are shamed and ridiculed for doing what we are so scared to do ourselves. We shield ourselves from seeing the connection between them and us.

- Defensiveness

This is one of the most successful ways of diversion. We respond to any sort of criticism as rudeness, arrogance and a sense of entitlement. We block everything out such that we do not have to pay attention to any information that is in fact correct.

- Cynicism, Despair

We are sad about certain things, but instead of confronting them we choose to generalise and universalise the problem. We claim everything and everyone is terrible. We spread the pain in such a manner that the causes of this particular pain are no longer the focus of attention.

I remember all the times I had opted for one of these practices; and at times even all at once – all to run away from dealing with what was really bothering me.

However, we need to learn to be honest with ourselves because we pay a very high price for the lies we tell ourselves. We miss opportunities to grow and learn. We are not nice to be around. We develop unhealthy harmful coping systems. We owe it to ourselves to dare to confront our real issues.

Until we can truly be honest with ourselves, until we can face and tackle all our truths and demons one at a time, we do not really know ourselves. The journey to self-knowledge can be very challenging, painful and excruciating but it is essential in our growth as human beings.

### ***3. Knowledge of Our Surroundings.***

#### **The Johari Window**

<b><i>Open</i></b> <i>Known to Self and Others</i>	<b><i>Blind</i></b> <i>Not known to self but others</i>
<b><i>Hidden</i></b> <i>Known to self but not others</i>	<b><i>Unknown</i></b> <i>Not known to self or others</i>

I consider the Johari Window as a bridge between the knowledge of the self and the knowledge of the surroundings. It combines the conscious and subconscious. To really know ourselves, we must be ready to openly conquer all these areas of our lives with a willing heart and an open mindset.

The Johari Window Model says that there are four windows to our lives – The open window, the Blind Window, the Hidden Window and the Unknown window.

The open window is known to all including the self. These are possibly the things that are easiest to deal with as we are aware of their existence, have admitted them to ourselves, and also know that others know about them.

The Blind Window is one of the harder ones to confront – if negative. When highlighted to us by others, it is called “constructive criticism” from their end, and “an offense” on our end. This quickly results in the “Defensiveness” method of deflecting. The more patient we are with ourselves, the easier it becomes to swallow truths that are otherwise hard to swallow.

The Hidden Window is also an interesting one to deal with. This can normally be associated with the “distraction/addiction” method of deflecting. This is so much easier to do as we are the only ones who know about our problems. If we do not wish to face them, we simply keep putting them off by distracting ourselves and fixating on other cheap thrills.

Lastly, the unknown window - these are things not (yet) known to you or anyone else. After you have conquered the first three

windows of your life, you have window number four to keep conquering and keeping learning more and more about ourselves. We have so much to learn in this life, and even more about our mere selves.

When we have conquered ourselves, we figure out what directly influences us, what drives us, and what gets to us. It is with this knowledge that we must create a hierarchy of things in our lives so that we know our priorities, what must be resolved, what can be cast away, and what must be dealt with if we are to grow and move forward. We also decide what is most important to us, what we simply cannot do without, and what might be holding us back.

### ***HOW YOU TREAT YOURSELF***

What you say to you, about you, around you – that is what you become.

When you have fully conquered yourself and you are fully confident that you love yourself, you treat yourself according to the same standard.

People who have self-love are more mindful of who they are and how they act. When you love yourself, you tend to know what exactly it is that you think, feel, and want – contrary to what other people would want for you. This does not mean that what you want for yourself is the best option, but rather, you are aware of, and will tend to prioritise your own option. Self-love means that you are also able to assess things objectively and go with the



option that gives the most optimal results for your benefit. You start to break off all subconscious behaviour and become more aware of your personal traits.

Dr. Deborah Khoshaka highlights seven steps to really embrace self-love and care.

Before I begin to dissect this information, I want you to be aware that when I went through my journey of self-love, I did not know Dr. Deborah Khoshaka, and so I suppose you are lucky. I went through all these steps without having read about them, so I know that she is not far from the truth.

1. *Become mindful.*

People who have more self-love tend to know what they think, feel and want. They begin to know who they really are and explore what that means for them. They will act on this knowledge, contrary to what others want for them.

Loving myself meant I had to explore who I was. I had to get to understand why I was the way that I was, which meant going back into little details of my past, to identify my present and then plan my future. I began to worry more about what “I” want contrary to what everyone around me expected from me.

2. *Act on what you need rather than what you want.*

You love yourself when you can turn away from something that feels good and exciting to what you need to stay strong, centered, and move forward in your life. By staying focused on what you

need, you turn away from automatic behaviour patterns that get you into trouble, keep you stuck in the past, and lessen self-love.

This reflected highly in most of my decisions. I normally thought of the lack of self-love as insecurity. Insecurity in myself, and my decisions. Most times, when people feel insecure, they make decisions they wouldn't otherwise make if they were content with who they are. Being secure with who you are, means that you can be able to tell your needs and wants, and be certain that those are not affected by other people. This then will affect all aspects of your life, from career, friendship to romantic associations. You will begin to put yourself and your own needs first, without being selfish of course.

### *3. Practice good self-care.*

You will love yourself more, when you take better care of your basic needs. People who are high in self-love nourish themselves daily through healthy activities, like sound nutrition, exercise, proper sleep, intimacy and healthy social interactions.

Having acted on your needs, you will now begin to take care of yourself. You will begin to ask yourself "What do I need?" "How can I be better?" "How can I change?" and so on. You make yourself a priority and embark on a journey of truly bettering yourself.

### *4. Set boundaries.*

You'll love yourself more when you set limits or say no to work, love, or activities that deplete or harm you physically, emotionally and spiritually, or express poorly who you are.

I think by now you are noticing that the act of self-love hinges a lot around you knowing when to say yes, and when to say no. Everything you choose to entertain in your life affects how you act, and as such, it is essential for you to know what to say yes and no to.

5. *Protect yourself.*

Bring the right people into your life. Dr. Deborah speaks of *frenemies* –the type of "friends" who take pleasure in your pain and loss rather than in your happiness and success. She says: *Get rid of them!* You do not have time to waste on people who want to take away the shine on your face that says, "I genuinely love myself and life". You will love and respect yourself more.

6. *Forgive yourself.*

We humans can be so hard on ourselves. The downside of taking responsibility for our actions, is punishing ourselves too much for mistakes in learning and growing. You have to accept that you are human, you are not perfect, before you can truly love yourself. Strive to be less hard on yourself when you make a mistake. It does not mean that you are a failure if you have learnt and grown from your mistakes, you have just learnt lessons.

7. *Live intentionally.*

When you live with purpose and design, you will accept and love yourself and whatever is happening in your life. Your purpose doesn't have to be crystal clear to you. If your intention is to live a meaningful and healthy life, you will make decisions that support this intention, and feel good about yourself when you succeed in this purpose. You will love yourself more if you see yourself accomplishing what you set out to do. To do this, you need to establish your living intentions.

Be clear to yourself the kind of life you want to live.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jnr six months before he was assassinated spoke to a group of students at Barratt Junior High School on their graduation on October 26, 1967 in Philadelphia. This is up to today one of the most eloquent speeches of our time and one that has truly changed my life.

The speech states a few things that every person in his or her teens should consider having in their life's plans. With all of my life, I wish I could just copy and paste the entire speech here for you to read because I deeply believe that every teenager should have read or heard this speech by the end their teens. So I will make a request to you to look up this speech on the internet or where you can find it by the end of your teens.

***By the end of your teens, Dr. King says that you are in the process of building the structure of your lives, and the question is whether you have a proper, a solid and a sound blueprint.***

Dr. King suggests some of the things that should be in your life's blueprint and I want you to hold on to these five below:

1. A deep belief in your own dignity, your worth and your own somebodiness.
2. The determination to achieve excellence in your various fields of endeavour.
3. Study hard. Do not drop out of school.

*“And I say to you, my young friends, doors are opening to you--doors of opportunities that were not open to your mothers and your fathers — and the great challenge facing you is to be ready to face these doors as they open.”*

4. When you discover what you will be in your life, set out to do it as if God Almighty called you at this particular moment in history to do it.
5. Don't just set out to do a good job. Set out to do such a good job that the living, the dead or the unborn couldn't do it any better.

*"If a man can write a better book or preach a better sermon or make a better mousetrap than his neighbour, even if he builds his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door."*

**- Ralph Waldo Emerson**

I still urge you to find the full speech, and then tell me you disagree with me and that this is not one of the best speeches you have ever heard.

His speech is quite exhaustive in this regard. Obviously, you cannot tackle all these principles all at once. I suggest you give yourself a deadline and focus on one of these principles at a time. Work on whatever you can to better yourself, just make sure you

are consistently working towards a better you. Pick one or two principles to work on, Recycle and repeat.

Here comes the golden rule:

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

*And*

### ***THEREFORE HOW YOU TREAT OTHERS***

You see our self-love reflects in the energy around us. In a quest of self-love, having pursued steps 1 to 3, we are well on our way to a physically, emotionally, and psychologically healthier life. Once we have healed from everything we have been through, we start to get to know ourselves and we remain true to who we are. We do our best to no longer lie to ourselves. We try to deal with all the real issues around us. We are not cynical and deflective; therefore, we are a truly positive energy to be around. The universe will reflect this energy and thus, begins your cycle of positive actions and reactions.

We become more pleasant to be around. We are truly present in our friends and families' lives. We are more active in our lovers' lives. We show up for those important for us and are truly supportive of their quests. We are more open to working out issues with our colleagues. We chat freely and laugh more with all the people around us. We are no longer defensive and do not take offense easily. We listen truly and learn not to take every single concern as an attack on us, instead, we take constructive criticism well and listen to those that have concerns regarding us. We give

sound and great advice to our friends when they are going through hardships. Our friends and family also feel safe to turn to us in time of need because of the energy we give.

Once we truly begin to love ourselves, we begin to love better. We begin to be better people, firstly, to ourselves, and then to all the people around us. We give better love to all the people we come across. The love we give is the love we receive.

## Chapter 2. HAPPINESS

### Definition

#### **1. Happy:**

*Feeling or showing pleasure or contentment – (The Wikipedia)*

#### **2. Happiness:**

*The state of being happy – (Merriam Webster)*

*“Happiness is an inside job. Do not assign anyone that much power over your life.”*

**- Mandy Hales**

I like being happy - I like the feeling. Better yet, I like the state of being happy - it is a beautiful state. I am not talking about the fake happy state where you smile and do all sorts of things to prove to others that you are happy. I am talking about actually just being happy, without requiring to prove it to someone else that you are. That is what I consider happiness.

As a teen I wish somebody had told me the simple phrase **“Happiness is not there”**. Not in the validation of the entire world. Not in all the money. Not in material things. Not in 1,000 Instagram likes. Not in 5,000 Facebook friends. Not in that dream job or perhaps even a lover. Happiness is simply not there.



I tried to chase it all - Befriended every next person on Facebook, got the 10,000 Instagram followers, the 500 likes per picture...to the Magazine features, the blogs and TV Shows. The more I tried to chase validation in places it didn't exist, thinking it would make me happy, the less happy I became.

Slowly and with time I started to do the things I truly enjoyed from the bottom of my heart. I am not sure what was exactly the pivotal point – or at least at which phase of the process. I don't know if it was at my first heartbreak, or mending my relationship with my mother, or maybe when I began to love myself. I am still curious about which one came first. Was it the self-love or the happiness? Could I be able to define that love if not on a scale of how happy I was? But could I be able to attain that happiness if I did not love myself? Maybe, they went hand in hand.

Before we talk about happiness, perhaps it will be easier to talk about the state of *“being unhappy”*. Surprisingly, I can easily remember the moments I felt really unhappy, contrary to moments I felt genuinely happy. Perhaps not that surprising, as humans, it is easier for us to be negative than it actually is to be positive. I remember the first time I got fired more vividly than the first time I got a job. I remember the heartbreak better than I remember falling in love. I remember the times I have been close to depression, better than the times I have been beyond ecstatic. That, I guess, is the natural order of this life.

The best time to truly test what happiness is to you is when absolutely nothing is going right for you – when you are almost desperate to turn things around.

If you can define clearly what makes you unhappy, you can easily define what makes you happy. From experience, I have learnt that happiness is not about chasing little moments of ecstasy. I am usually happy when I eliminate everything that makes me unhappy.

By the end of your teens I hope you will understand what happiness truly means to you. I hope you will spare a little time to really read about the psychology of happiness because you truly and fully enjoy only the things you understand.

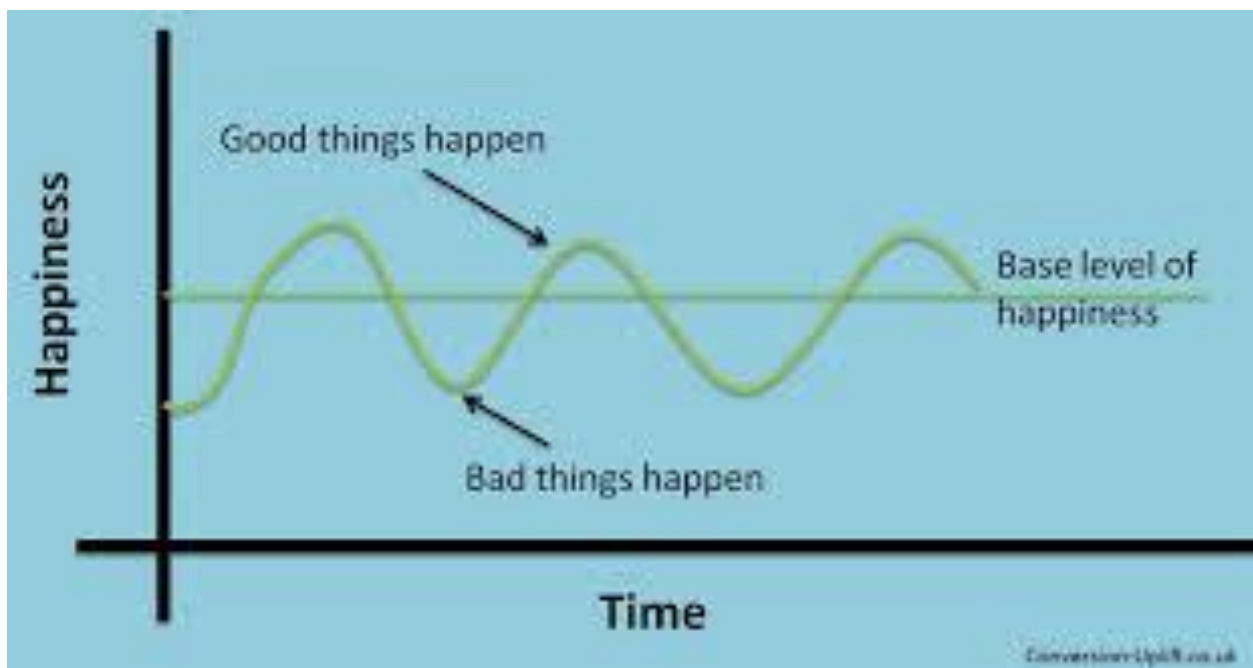
### **What is happiness, really?**

Psychologists Robert Biswas-Diener and Todd B. Kashdan (2013) noted that, nowadays, as people are having more interest in self-growth, they worry a lot about how to live their best lives such that the secret of happiness is of much concern to most of the people in this modern era.

Hedonic Treadmill is a psychology theory that really helps put things in perspective regarding the “Art” of Happiness. Generally, the Hedonic Treadmill is the observed tendency of humans to quickly return to a relatively stable level of happiness despite major positive or negative events or life changes. Hedonic adaptation/theory stipulates that there is happiness "set point"; thus, humans generally maintain a constant level of happiness throughout their lives, despite events that occur in their environment. True lasting happiness and the definition of

happiness according to the Hedonic Treadmill theory is about that setting point.

Happiness is partly emotional and therefore tethered to the truth that each individual's feelings have a natural set point, like a thermostat, which genetic make-up and personality play a role in its establishment. Positive events give you a boost, but before long you swing back to your natural set point.



Philosophers, theologians, psychologists, even economists, have long sought to define it. Happiness has for long been considered an elusive state, and since the 1990s, a whole branch of psychology – positive psychology, has been dedicated to pinning happiness down – The Pursuit of Happiness.

Biswas-Diener and Kashdan (2013) say that true happiness lasts longer than a burst of dopamine – a neurotransmitter that helps control the brain's reward and pleasure centres. It is thus

important to think of it as something more than just emotion. In their article “What Happy People Do Differently”, they argue that your sense of happiness also includes cognitive reflections, such as when you give a mental thumbs-up or thumbs-down to your best friend's sense of humour, how the shape of your nose makes you feel, or the quality of your marriage. They also say that only a bit of this sense has to do with how you feel; the rest is the product of mental arithmetic, when you compute your expectations, your ideals, your acceptance of what you can't change, and countless other factors. Happiness is a state of mind, and as such, can be intentional and strategic.

You find that what we define as happiness as teenagers is not really what happiness should be. We define happiness as those moments we were excited, the moments you were not rejected, the moments you were applauded, and the simple highs. Happiness is more than a simple positive mood - a state of well-being that encompasses living a good life—that is, with a sense of meaning and deep satisfaction. Research, in fact, has shown that happiness is not the result of bouncing from one joy to the next. Achieving true happiness involves times of considerable discomfort.

**Positive psychology** is "the scientific study of what makes life most worth living", or "the scientific study of positive human functioning and flourishing on multiple levels that include the biological, personal, relational, institutional, cultural, and global dimensions of life" (Wikipedia).

Basically positive psychology argues that happiness is about living “The Good Life”. The good life is commonly measured as “Eudemonia” – the reflection about what holds the greatest value in life – the factors that contribute the most to a well-lived and fulfilling life. Eudemonia is Greek word that precisely means “Humans Flourishing,” and in simple terms, it means happiness. Aristotle defines Eudemonia as the level of highest human good. Happiness is normally linked to character.

There will be much for you to question as you grow, and hopefully you will be inspired to take a little more interest in psychology, which will help you dig deeper and find all the arguments and counter-arguments regarding all these theories – but by the end of your teens at the very least know the basics of positive psychology.

One of the psychologists, Azadeh Aalai, **Ph. D (2017)** carried out a small exercise in one of her lectures to understand how her students understood the definition of happiness.

She shared with her students one study that found out that getting an extra hour of sleep each night would do more for a person’s daily happiness than getting a \$60,000 raise (Rubin, 2009). In response to these findings, one student asked, who exactly they asked that question to get those results – leading to a debate, as she encouraged her students to consider the cumulative toll of sleep deprivation on well-being and happiness.

See, as teens, we seek the instant gratification as compared to the slow day-today process.

Dr. Aalai then discussed with her students the distinction between pleasure-seeking or quick bursts of pleasure, which could come

from a large bonus or raise versus more stable or long-lasting forms of well-being that require greater discipline and lifestyle habits, and include sleep-related behaviours. Both types of experiences could perhaps be described as happiness, although one is more fleeting than the other. One is the base of the Hedonic Treadmill, as the fluctuations occur.

Money is important to happiness, but only to so much. As Coco Chanel said, “The best things in life are free. Money buys us freedom from worry about the basics in life – housing, food, and clothing. However, genetic makeup, life circumstances, achievements, marital status, social relationships, even the people around you– all can influence how happy you are.

Research has shown that much of happiness is under personal control. Regularly indulging in small pleasures (such as warm baths!), getting absorbed in challenging activities, setting and meeting your goals, maintaining close social ties, and finding purpose beyond oneself are all actions that increase life satisfaction. Thus, an individual ways of thinking and expressing feeling also determines how happy you are.

We can conclude that happiness is not the fleeting joys but rather the setting point which you revert to when the highs and lows are gone. As a teenager, your natural setting point will most likely be quite low and hence the need for constant highs. I want you to make it your mission as a teenager to raise that setting point – to improve your hedonic adaptation. But how do you do this?

## **What Happy People Do Differently**

Most people ask psychologists the question “What can I do to be happy?”

The pursuit of happiness is not unique to any particular part of the world. People from every corner of the globe rated happiness as being more important than other highly desirable personal outcomes, such as having meaning in life, becoming rich, and getting into heaven.

Happiness does not just feel good but is good for you. Most people accept that true happiness is more than a jumble of intensely positive feelings; better described as a sense of "peace" or "contentedness."

Regardless of your emotional set point, your everyday habits and choices can improve your well-being. This ranges from the way you operate in a friendship to how you reflect on your life decisions. Research shows that activities that lead us to feel uncertain, discomfort, and even a dash of guilt are associated with some of the most memorable and enjoyable experiences of people's lives. Happy people, it seems, engage in a wide range of counter-intuitive habits that seem downright *unhappy*.

### **Solitude as a Pathway to Happiness**

Psychology in trying to understand happiness suggests a few things you can try to find inner peace and happiness. One of the most important things is learning and mastering the art of being alone. Normally you would associate being alone with loneliness, and well – unhappiness. On the contrary, being alone, most commonly known as solitude, has been said to be great for your happiness.

But how does being alone affect your happiness? I discovered some of these science-backed reasons:

### ***1. Alone time increases empathy.***

When you spend time with a certain circle of friends or your co-workers, you develop a “we vs. them” mentality. Spending time alone helps you develop more compassion for people who may not fit into your ‘inner circle.’

As teenagers, there is that constant struggle to fit in with others. Not fitting in can make you feel like an outcast and rejected. You have, as a teenager most likely been on both ends of the spectrum. You have felt rejected, and have also made another feel rejected.

Spending time alone will not only build your strength and allow you to handle rejection, but also build your empathy towards others that have been rejected.

### ***2. Solitude increases productivity.***

People perform better when they have a little privacy. Studies have shown that being constantly surrounded by people kills productivity.

Take some time always to get in touch with your heart and resonate with your deepest self. This applies to all areas of your life. Simply, learn to spend some time alone.

### ***3. Solitude sparks creativity.***

There’s a reason a lot of authors or artists want to go to a cabin in the woods or a private studio to work. Being alone with your



thoughts gives your brain a chance to wander, which can help you become more creative.

If you have any talent or are particularly good at some art, you learn that you perfect it better in your alone time.

#### ***4. Being alone can help you build mental strength.***

We're social creatures and it's important for us to have strong connections with other people. But, solitude is essential to build mental strength. Studies have shown that the ability to tolerate alone time has been linked to increased happiness, better life satisfaction, improved stress management and lessened depression.

#### ***5. Being alone gives you an opportunity to plan your life.***

Most people spend a lot of time planning weddings and vacations but never plan how to get the most out of life. Spending time alone can give you a chance to ensure there's a purpose to all that you do.

By the end of your teens, you are at a defining point in your life. Who do you want to be? How do you wish to be remembered? Take some time out to think about that.

#### ***6. Solitude helps you know yourself.***

Being alone helps you become more comfortable in your own skin. When you're by yourself, you can make choices without outside influences. All of that helps you develop more insight into who you are as a person.

Set aside a few minutes each day to be alone with your thoughts. Silence your electronics and allow yourself to think for a few minutes. Just be you.

If you aren't used to solitude, it can feel uncomfortable at first. But creating that quiet time for yourself could be key to becoming the best version of yourself.

There are a few principles that I have adapted from all this knowledge about being happy:

***Do the simple things.***

Happiness is not found in all the complicated places. Pure happiness is found in the depths of simplicity. Think of a baby's laughter – how a peek-a-boo game will just send her into a beautiful outburst of happiness. Timely highs and thrills are necessary, but it is also important to make sure that your set point is naturally high. Not only will that ensure that you never slip into depression, but you also take away the need to constantly be looking for highs to get you out of your misery as your natural set point is already high enough. You have contentedness. You are happy and healthy.

***Make happy friends***

The friends you choose to keep really affect your state of happiness. I would never blame my friends for my unhappiness as a teen but I do fault my choice of certain friends that tore me down.

As a teenager, you are most likely hormonal. Everyone around you is. You are growing up, and very fast at that. Everyone around you is trying to fit in with whom and what seems cool and most times going to unnecessary extremes, and in the process, hurting each other.

Most of your peers are very mean, for usually no good reason. They will probably regret it in future and even apologise for it, but right now you need to take care of you. To be happy you need genuinely good souls around you. You need people who do not constantly drag you down from your set point. It takes time to figure out who is genuinely good and who is truly your friend, but I hope by the end of your teens you have this bit figured out.

Make sure your friends are nice. Make sure they are good people. Most importantly, make sure they are happy people. That happiness will rub off on you and is fundamental for your own well-being too.

***Keep those that keep you laughing and happy***

Laughter is essential. Be very self-aware. Get in touch with what truly makes you happy and keep pursuing that to maintain your set-point at a good level. Keep good energy around. Stay laughing.  
Stay happy.

### Chapter 3. BEAUTY

*“If only our eyes saw souls instead of bodies, how very different our ideals of beauty would be.”*

- Anon

“You’re beautiful,” he said.

“Oh, all right,” I replied.

“Won’t you even say thank you? That was a compliment.”

“Oh, was it? I thought you were simply stating your opinion on my appearance.”

I was all dolled up in every bit of make-up I owned, wearing the sexiest dress I thought I could find in my closet. It was until he called me beautiful, that I knew looking and ‘being’ beautiful meant very different things. I also realised that these differences can be noted in even how the word is pronounced.

I recall a certain argument I had with a few roommates back in secondary school when I was 14 years old. The argument was based on the definition of the word beautiful. My friends argued that the word beautiful means someone being stunning and pleasant to the eye. Now my 10 year old self would probably have agreed with that definition, but my 14 year old self was not happy with that analysis. In my opinion, I said, beautiful is a word much

different from words like ‘pretty’, ‘lovely’ and ‘cute’. The word beautiful means much more than that to me. In as much as one would use all the words including ‘beautiful’ to describe a physical appearance, I believe the word beautiful describes more. It is more wholesome and captures more in whole what a person is, than just what they look like. Now, obviously, what one looks like is paramount to what a person is because it literally is the first thing you get to experience about a human (unless they are a writer or a voice over actor) but there surely is more. The way the person talks, the way they treat others, the way they associate with people different from them, their heart for change, their effort to self-improvement, the things they say and do, the way they feel about themselves, how they take care of themselves, how they take care of others, and a lot of other things.

By the end of my teens, the definition of the word beautiful had changed vastly to me.

### **Definition:**

#### ***“Beauty”***

*A combination of qualities – such as shape, colour, or form that pleases the aesthetic senses, especially the sight.*

#### ***“Beautiful”***

*Pleasing the senses or mind aesthetically.*

#### ***“Kalon”***

*Beauty that is more than skin-deep.*

*The ideal of physical and moral beauty.*

I highlighted the definition “Kalon” because that is the beauty I would love to focus on in this chapter. By the end of your teens, I hope your definition of beauty would be more than skin deep – beyond just the way you or others look.

**You define your own beauty.**

*“Imagine a glass panel filled with mirrors. Inside the glass an image appears, slowly and steadily as it transforms into a shape. This shape is of a young woman, a young woman gazing intently into the mirror. Her body language clearly shows she is not amused. She appears to be fidgeting as she gazes deeper. Tears are trickling down her cheeks and forming small puddles upon her face. Tissues are shredded around her, as her lips quiver trying to hold in her cries. Something she has been taught to do, to hold it in and create an almost façade of who she is.”*

**- Marissa DePino**

I love Marissa DePino definition of beauty beyond the looks.

The connotation of beauty in itself implies splendour, magnificence and exquisiteness. Many perceive these connotations as a reference to physical beauty. In turn, the true definition of beauty is often lost or overlooked. It has become materialised into this idea that beauty is only skin deep – beauty standards, if you may call it.

As a teenager you have possibly been led into believing that you are only beautiful if your hair curls a certain way, you have the perfect brows, your skin is flawless or that your teeth are perfectly

white. In your teens, you are probably focused on all the fun things. Your outfits have to be on point. Your hair has to be perfectly done or cut. Your nails must always be “on fleek” and your make up forever “slaying”. Your shoe-game is always under question and oh so many things that in all we define as ‘beautiful’.

I remember my father complaining to my mother asking, “Why is Nthanda always in the bathroom whenever I get home?” It may have been a genuine concern on his part but in all honesty, I always went to the bathroom because it had a bigger mirror than my room. I constantly had to check myself to make sure not a single hair nor make up was out of place.

The young woman described by Marissa represents numerous women who suffer from the unrealistic idea of beauty. A beauty ideology that one has set for themselves often influenced by society. There’s this idea that there is an ideal beauty mould that each woman should possess and strive to be - that if this ideal beauty standard is not met, then there is a problem with that woman.

To be beautiful there are no guidelines. One’s assets cannot define beauty, for the beauty of the mind, heart and soul defines beauty. With that, there is nothing else one needs.

As you get older you will most likely get busier, and I hope you do. You will start to realise that inward perfection is by far much more important than outward perfection. Instead of focusing on having perfect hair, you will start to focus more on having a well-read and well-informed brain. Instead of worrying about how your clothes

hug your bust, you will be more worried about actually having a loving, caring and relatable heart.

Marissa states that the key is to remember to be beautiful and that there are no rules. Be beautiful for yourself not for others and let your beauty shine through. She says that beauty is your own definition and you are beauty. For as long as you have defined beauty by own standards, you become your own measure and are beauty itself in your own eyes. Other people's opinions of your physical appearance do not bother you as they used to when you gave them the power to define your beauty.

As you grow older, instead of having striking selfie angles, you will be more worried about having the correct angle and perspective on social issue – lending a listening ear and actually being up to date with current affairs. Instead of worrying about having that perfect British or that American (and sometimes mixed) accent, you will become more worried about the words that leave your mouth if at all actually having meaning.

As you grow and your life starts to have actual meaning, you will stop worrying about outward 'Beauty' and start focusing on Inward perfection. Instead of worrying about just **looking** pretty for the day, you will start to focus on actually **being** beautiful – from within every single day. The kind of beauty that stands the test of time and beauty that simply does not fade.

## **Natural Beauty**

I cannot quite say I am yet at a point I do not wish to be seen as beautiful. I am not certain if such a thing is at all achievable. When



I was 15 I spent hours in the bathroom making sure my eyebrows were on fleek, that my outfits were colour coordinating and hugged my (arguably inexistent) curves just right. I was unhappy that I was not as curvy as the other girls. I have always had an indecisive orangey tone of brown skin and at a time just wanted it to either be light or dark – preferably light, such that I could have bleached at that time. There were a number of things that bothered me about my appearance then. It meant that anyone who saw me better than the way I looked down on myself, made me feel great about myself. They made me feel beautiful.

Being a late bloomer did not make it easy for me to love my physical appearance. I remember when my sister looked at me as though I was insane as I told her that I would get breast implants when I got older and had made enough money. It must have been watching too much Dr. 90210 coupled with a number (a lot) of insecurities. Push-up extremely padded bras were the order of day. I wanted to get my bow-legs straightened somehow. I did not find it as ridiculous as I do now, when I heard of butt implants. There was a time I even considered getting permanent eyeliner (a tattoo across your eyelid that looks like eyeliner) for whatever good reason I must have had then.

I think of how at peace I am with my appearance now, and I acknowledge there are a lot of factors that have come into play. I finally did bloom – maybe not exactly as I had hoped but I was happy with the woman body I got. My hips eventually got wider. Suddenly my not so humongous chest did not bother me anymore. My skin complexion was just fine.

It was only in my twenties that I did start working out – and then I fell absolutely in love with my body; but not so much for what it looks like. I fell in love with what my body could do, how strong it could be, how much pain it could endure, how fast it could heal and how greatly it could transform. Working out also meant that I was continuously dehydrated and my body always craved water. I started drinking more and more water and guess which part of my body thanked me for it? My skin was glowing! That and African black soap. I am dropping serious self-care hints here – I hope you are grabbing them! If someone had handed 15 year old me the deal of getting a transplant of perfect skin somehow, I could have taken it! I wore more and more make up to cover up my acne issues and contoured my face in all sorts of ways to look like someone I was not.

### **African Beauty**

As a child, my favourite movie was *“Parent Trap”*. I even led myself to believe I was in fact pen pals with Lindsay Lohan. I was so disappointed when I got a bit older to find out she was not my age and that movies tend to freeze people in time. Shucks.

I remember picture day for my sister and I at home. My parents occasionally sent a photographer to the house to take a few pictures of us. I remember doing only one thing for my looks that day – and that was to carefully comb my afro into some neatly arranged bangs. My penpal, Lindsay had bangs.

I can only imagine how confused my parents must have been with my hairstyle when the pictures came back. I was the most shocked

as the look that came in the pictures was not the look I had been going for. I had the rest of my afro flared out, and the front-centre part of my hair sticking forward and up. It did not lay like Lindsay Lohan's had. As you can imagine, I was not very pleased.

Today I acknowledge, representation matters.

Back then I did not really question or think through most things as I do now. According to psychology, that may have meant that I was happier then, than I am now – and I quote *“The happiest people have a natural emotional protection against getting sucked in by the intense gravitational pull of little details.”* Ironic, if you ask me.

By the end of my teens I certainly wish I had seen more representation of black beauty on television. I wish I had seen more movies with black girls taking centre stage – and as we naturally do, wish I looked like them.

I know I want my daughter(s) to see more girls with afros and curly hair styles. I wish I saw more little girl with beautiful brown skin in the mainstream media. I wish I saw more little girls comfortably being black girls. All the black girls I saw on television back then had long curly hair and lighter skin. If I really saw a black girl on TV, it was a naked girl with beautiful over edited brown skin on a Vaseline advert. There was a few more but none that I looked at and said “wow! I want to be her!”

As children, we latch onto everything we are exposed to. We are at a stage of learning where we are hungry for knowledge. We are eager to know more. We observe the world, what it accepts, what it rejects and try to emulate that which it readily accepted. Back

then we used to call it fitting in. I hope by the end of your teens, “*fitting in*” is not on the list of your problems.

If we are exposed to too much television, we always catch a thing or two from it. We see all the white people represented. We see all the black girls with the lighter skin and curly hair. We try harder and harder to be more like them. You find little black girls trying to relax their hair so it can be straight or curly. You see little black girls trying to bleach their skin so it can be lighter. Can you blame them when that is all they are exposed to? Can you blame them when the only black girls they see on TV have long wigs or are mixed having curly hair? Can you blame them when their own mothers tell them their hair needs to be “*treated*” as soon as it starts showing any signs of being its true self – an “*afro*”?

Today I want to tell you ***black girl***, you are enough. You, with the **beautiful brown skin**, you, with the **kinky African hair**, you, with the **well-rounded curves**, you, with your **short height** - you do not need to be anybody else - you are enough. And if nobody has told you yet, **black girl, you are enough!** Black girl, you are beautiful, naturally.

## Chapter 4. GOD AND THE UNIVERSE

To fully comprehend any piece of creation, one must understand its creator.

I like to perceive God as the universe. I think of God as existence itself. The very reason why we are all here - the Universe - creation.

Of course, my good friend Evans N. Banda did not hesitate to correct me on this, so let me clarify, before we proceed. My comparison of God to the Universe is not, in any way, to insinuate that the two can be used interchangeably. However, I use the universe to comprehend how great God is – God being the creator of creation. The moment you realise that even the Universe is not great enough to be compared to God, that is the moment you will even be more mind-blown about God’s greatness. So if I am using just this Universe to prove how great God is, first we must contextualise how amazing the Universe is.

**Matt Slick (2008)** discussed whether God and the Universe could be the same thing. He hindered on an argument of “Pantheism” to differentiate God from his creation. His argument is interesting because it proves this fact from two angle – that is proving that the Universe is not eternal, while God is eternal. To prove that the Universe is not eternal is quite simple – well, made simple by a science legend anyway. We simply have to refer to “The Theory of Everything” as discovered by Stephen Hawkings (1988) where he

proved that the Universe, TIME, in fact has a beginning. If something has a beginning, it must therefore, have an end. He went further, using mathematical equations to prove the beginning of time – otherwise known as “The Big Bang”.

From a Christian perspective God and the universe cannot be the same because God is the one who created the universe (Genesis 1:1-19). And for those who do not accept the word of God, there is still a way to prove this with theories. I will probably want you to understand this by the end of your twenties, but for now, it is simply essential to understand the separation of power between God and his creation. Next up is now to understand how great His creation is.

### **How big is the universe?**

I have always been fascinated by astrology.

Dr. Luke Davies from the Science Network did a very interesting analysis on the size of the Universe. He argues that the universe is so big that even light – the same light that moves at 299 792 458 metres per second hasn't had time to cross it in nearly 14 billion years.

Our brains struggle to comprehend how big the universe is because everything here on Earth, and even the Earth itself, is very small when compared to the immense scale of the universe.

In the time it took you to read this far, Dr. Davis says that a photon of light leaving the Sun has travelled about 10 million kilometres – equivalent to travelling around the Earth 250 times.

Light that leaves our second nearest star, Proxima Centauri, takes just over four years to reach Earth and so we can define it as four light years away.

As such, if you were to look at Proxima Centauri, you would not be seeing the star as it is right now, but how it 'was' 4 years ago!

We see all things in the universe as they were in the past, whether they're on the other side of the room or the other side of the galaxy.

To take this concept further, the nearest large galaxy to us is Andromeda which is so big and close that you can see it in the night sky with your naked eye.

What you're really seeing is 1,000's of billions of stars in a configuration similar to our Milky Way. However, all of those stars are about 2.5 million light years away, which means you're seeing Andromeda as it was 2.5 million years ago.

The whole universe is littered with galaxies just like the Milky Way and Andromeda, and using our most powerful telescopes we can see light from galaxies that have taken more than 13 billion years to reach us!

The universe is known to be about 13.8 billion years old, so any light we see has to have been travelling for 13.8 billion years or less – we call this the 'observable universe'.

However, the distance to the edge of the observable universe is about 46 billion light years because the universe is expanding all the time.

Though the light might have only travelled for 13.8 billion years, the distance from us to the point it came from is, at present, 46 billion light years!

So how big is our universe? Well we don't really know, but it's big. And it's still getting bigger all of the time.

I am truly hoping you are enjoying these analyses. I know it is a bit confusing. I know because I am confused too. But in the long-run it begins to make sense – it helps you understand the world we live in, the God that created it all, and in turn help you understand yourself better.

The Universe is so vast and so amazing. God created the universe and all its marvels, and thought, it could also use a little you.

Reading the book ***“Your God is too small”*** will make you realise how much you marginalise creation.

Let us begin here, Astronomers have discussed that there are at least 200 billion galaxies in the Universe. We only exist in one of these galaxies. This galaxy is the one that contains the Milky Way – the one that holds the Solar System among other things. The solar system contains 8 Planets, one of which is the earth, being the fifth largest. And on that earth is where we find all the continents, and then the countries and marginally, the little town or village you come from.

The Universe works in extremely magnificent ways. Let us focus on the Solar System alone. The Solar system as stated has 8 planets



namely, Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. All of these orbit around the Sun which is **1.392 million** km in diameter and up to **15 million degrees Celsius** hot. Keep in mind that all the elements in the 200 billion galaxies are fulltime in motion moving at different magnificent speeds.

According to NASA, this is the estimated radii of the eight planets in our solar system, in order of size. Relating their radii to that of the Earth:

- Jupiter (69,911 km / 43,441 miles) – 1,120% the size of Earth
- Saturn (58,232 km / 36,184 miles) – 945% the size of Earth
- Uranus (25,362 km / 15,759 miles) – 400% the size of Earth
- Neptune (24,622 km / 15,299 miles) – 388% the size of Earth
- Earth (6,371 km / 3,959 miles)
- Venus (6,052 km / 3,761 miles) – 95% the size of Earth
- Mars (3,390 km / 2,460 miles) – 53% the size of Earth
- Mercury (2,440 km / 1,516 miles) – 38% the size of Earth

Now I know this feels less like a Geography lesson, but I need you to understand these things so you can fully comprehend just how majestic creation is.

The planets are so strategically placed around the sun such that the slightest wrong movement of any single element in either speed or direction contrary to how the Universe intended would lead to very disastrous results. Picture the Earth bumping into Saturn and

maybe just a quarter of the earth being crushed. All of us could easily be wiped out in one go.

## **Earth and the Solar System**

Scaling factors: if the distance between the Earth and the Sun is scaled to one inch (2.5 cm) then one light year is one mile (1.6 km) [this is a remarkably good scale, correct to better than 1%! Therefore:

- If the distance between the Sun and the Earth is one inch, the nearest star is over 4 miles away.
- If the distance between the Sun and the Earth is one inch, the distance to the centre of our Galaxy is 25,000 miles (once round the Earth).
- If the distance between the Sun and the Earth is one inch, the nearest large galaxy is two million miles away (8 times the distance to the Moon).

## **Speeds:**

- The Earth's orbital speed around the Sun: 30 km/s (108,000 km/h)
- The Sun's orbital speed around the Galaxy: 200 km/s (720,000 km/h)
- The speed of the ground beneath your feet, as a result of the Earth's rotation: 1000 km/h) at the latitude of Sheffield (53 degrees); it goes up to 1670 km/h at the equator
- The speed of light: 300,000 km/s (1.08 billion km/h)

- The speed a rocket needs to attain to escape the Earth's gravity: about 8 km/s (5 miles/second, 29000 km/h, 18000 mph)
- The speed a rocket needs to attain to escape the Sun's gravity, starting from Earth orbit: about 45 km/s (i.e. about 15 km/s in addition to Earth's orbital speed)
- The speed a rocket needs to attain to reach the Sun: about 30 km/s, because it needs to cancel out Earth's orbital speed - so it is about twice as hard, in terms of speed needed, to reach the Sun as it is to reach the outer planets (about 4 times as hard in energy terms, because energy is proportional to speed squared)

### **Ages:**

- Of the Solar System: 4.6 billion years
- Of the oldest stars in the Galaxy: about 12 or 13 billion years
- Of the Universe: about 13.8 billion years
- Of multicellular life on Earth: about 700 million years
- Of modern humans: about 35000 years
- Of writing: about 5000 years

### **Numbers of moons:**

- Mercury 0
- Venus 0
- Earth 1

- Mars 2
- Jupiter (at least) 63
- Saturn (at least) 56, not counting ring particles
- Uranus (at least) 27
- Neptune (at least) 13
- Pluto 3
- Eris 1

Several asteroids also have moons.

All four giant planets also have ring systems, though Saturn's is much the largest and the only one visible with a small telescope.

Most of the moons of the giant planets, as well as Mars' too, are very small and are probably captured asteroids or fragments of larger bodies which broke up.

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When you are done appreciating the Universe, come back to the 5<sup>th</sup> largest planet in the Solar system on which we exist – the Earth. God chose only the earth to harbour life, to contain “us” as He created the Universe.

According to radiometric dating and other sources of evidence, Earth formed over 4 billion years ago. Earth's gravity interacts with other objects in space, especially the Sun and the Moon, Earth's only natural satellite. Earth revolves around the Sun in

365.26 days, a period known as an Earth year. During this time, Earth rotates about its axis about 366.26 times.

The shape of Earth is approximately oblate spheroidal. Due to rotation, the Earth is flattened along the geographic axis and bulging around the equator. The diameter of the Earth at the equator is 43 kilometres larger than the pole-to-pole diameter. The average diameter of the reference spheroid is 12,742 kilometres.

The earth has 7 continents namely Africa, Antarctica, Asia, Australia/Oceania, Europe, North America, and South America; 5 oceans namely: the Atlantic, Pacific, Indian, and Arctic and South Antarctic. It also has 195 countries, with a current population of approximately 8 billion.

From there navigate the country you are from. I come from a relatively small country, with 29 districts and a population of about 17 Million people, 5 lakes and several mountains. Now having scaled down to your very home town, start scaling back up, and think of all the families, all the little communities, that make up districts, districts that make up regions, regions making up countries, continents, planets, and galaxies. What a world?

I could go deeper and deeper about the World's geographical composition. I probably should have, but I do hope by the end of your teens you invest a good amount of your time in learning about the stunning world we live in.

The God that created all this – the Universe, that is the God we serve. The God who created all of the 200 billion galaxies. The God who owns the earth and the heavens. The God who can

create more. The God who probably has. The God who created you and I.

That same God (and His universe) still takes time to take care of you. If you can understand this very simple thing, then you have taken your first step into knowing your world and loving it, and therefore knowing and loving yourself.

## Chapter 5. CULTURAL IDENTITY

*“I feel like a tourist in my own country.”*

*“You still think of this place as your country?”*

*He pointed to an old man wearing ragged clothes trudging down a dirt path . “That’s the real Afghanistan . . . That’s the Afghanistan I know. You? You’ve always been a tourist here, you just didn’t know it.”*

*– An extract from The Kite Runner*

### **Definition**

#### ***Culture***

*The ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society.*

#### ***Identity***

- 1. The fact of being who or what a person or thing is.*
- 2. A close Similarity or Affinity.*

I am an African Woman  
I got my heart from my father  
I got my pride from my mother  
I am everything but nothing like my sister  
I am stubborn and resilient like my brother  
I am passionate like my grandfather  
I am blunt like my grandmother  
I am everyone I have ever met  
I am everything I have been through  
I am everything that was before me  
I am everything that is to come

Say it with me, whatever you are, whatever you think you are; declare it, proclaim it, say it out loud. Tell your story. Speak of what identifies you. Live your present. Tell me where you have been. Darling! that is who you are. There is absolutely no shame in that. We begin here with ourselves – my story, your story, who we are, it all begins right here. Right here with ourselves.

All the things that you have experienced have made you. They compose your identity.



Tell me what made you cry

Tell me about who made you laugh your lungs out

And made you think “Oh what a beautiful world!”

Tell me what broke your soul.

Tell me how many years,

How many people it took

To stitch it back together.

Tell me of the days you felt like your heart would not survive the night.

Tell me about the morning you woke up,

Almost amazed your heart was that strong.

What did it take, darling?

How many people? How many things?

How did you get here?

Tell me your truth.

Tell me of your identity.

I remember being in Cambodia, thousands of miles away from home with at least 100 people from different walks of life. I saw people naturally grouping up. The Asians were the only ones that were not really connected as a result of language barrier. The Africans naturally stuck to one corner, the Spanish girls had their

own group, and the British girls were on their own, and so on. Even within those groupings were subgroupings. It was simply a matter of who you identified with the most.

That is the issue of identity, culture – who I am, who you are. Culture is more than just about knowing who we are. It is knowing our past, our present and therefore using that knowledge to predict or map our future. Identity is an essential part of our being.

*“Those who don’t know their history are doomed to repeat it”*

**– Edmund Burke**

So then, knowing this, why is it that some people do not embrace their culture? Why is it that some people do not embrace who they are?

*“Categorisations about identity, even when codified and hardened into clear typologies by processes of colonisation, state formation or general modernising processes, are always full of tensions and contradictions. Sometimes these contradictions are destructive, but they can also be creative and positive.”*

But first, let us define **Cultural identity**.

According to Wikipedia, Cultural Identity is *“The identity or feeling of belonging to a group.”* It goes further to say that this is part of a person's self-conception and self-perception, and these are related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality or any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture. In this way, cultural identity is both the characteristic of an individual as well as of the culturally identical group of members sharing the same cultural identity.

I remember my childhood days more vividly than I do some days of my adult life. How I ended up growing up in Mangochi around Yao people is a whole story for another day. Some two great *Sena* and *Tumbuka* marines may have been involved.

I grew up in a gated community, much too detached from the realities I face every day. When I remember the life out of the gated community, on a number of occasions I snuck out to experience it, the first thing that comes to mind is “*Zinyau*”. “*Zinyau*” are African Cultural Dancers that are also well-respected with their myths attached.

I recall the drummers whose drumming really remains incomparable for me to this day. I remember all the people dancing around - the women, with their “*zilundu*” wrapped around their waists, winding their waists like they lacked a backbone, and the way the men hummed and sung along in their deep voices. I remember the children running around, laughing and smiling as they danced along themselves, occasionally having to run away from the “*zinyau*”. Myth had it, if they, the *zinyau*, caught you, you would be in very big big trouble. We never went as far as finding out what that trouble would be. All we had to know was that the scary “*zinyau*” would get you in trouble, and really that is all little children needed to know to start running - once or thrice, I was that kid. Eventually I was to find out that once the *zinyau* caught you, you would be taken to the “*dambwe*” to get you initiated as one of them. Some argued that once caught, you would go through the full standard Yao initiation ceremony and come out only when the other children came out. Others argued that they would take you

to the chief of the village and your parents would redeem you by paying a fine of a goat to the village chief. There were so many myths that surrounded the so-called *Zinyau* that we never bothered to confirm. I remember the warnings that would come if someone saw a *Chinyau* (singular for *Zinyau*) in the village. The women would be screaming at their children to get to safety inside their home. It was the ultimate mix of running towards and away from the “*zinyau*” that made it really such a classic experience. As to whether any of the myths were true or not, I still cannot be able to tell you. One thing I do know is that, we all believed with our hearts that it was true - that was their culture.

If we do not know why we are here, we might as well not be here at all.

I ask again, then, why is it that some people do not take pride in their culture?

There are so many ways that the world will use to identify people and their cultures. This categorisation also comes into play in trying to find common characteristics among different groupings of people. I am telling you my experience, as I am, an African girl from the poorest country in the world, Malawi. I am telling you my experience as a *Sena* and a *Tumbuka* that grew up among the *Yaos*. You see there are so many things that identify me.

There have been a number of occasions where people would say:

“Oh you’re from Mangochi. I have heard so much about *Yaos*”.

I would then correct them to say I only grew up there, and proceed to state my real cultural background.

Then they would go ahead and say,

“Oh I have heard even more about *Senas!*”

It was not that they knew me or knew about me. They simply had to know my culture to make a few assumptions about who I am or who I may be. Culture gives us identity. It gives us a sense of belonging.

## **Youth culture**

Culture is not only about your traditional beliefs, but also encompasses your social behaviours. As we are talking about understanding culture as a teenager, it would not make sense to skip the idea of Youth Culture.

As defined by the Wikipedia, Youth Culture is the way adolescents live, and the norms, values, and practices they share and this differs from the culture of older generations.

Elements of youth culture include beliefs, behaviours, styles, and interests. Think of the clothes you wear, the popular music of your generation, the sports you and your friends love to play or support, the vocabulary you use, and dating patterns - all these things are different with every generation and these things set adolescents apart from other age groups, giving them what many believe is a distinct culture of their own.

Your teenage years are your years of identity development. Psychological theorists have noted the role youth culture plays in this. Youth culture may be a means of achieving identity during a time when your role in life is not always clear. There are a few psychological theories about youth culture that will probably help you in the understanding of who you are.

Erik Erikson (1950s) theorised that the major psychological conflict of adolescence is identity versus role confusion. The goal of this stage of life is to answer the question, "Who am I?"

Adolescence is basically a phase of your life where, in the words of Britney Spears, you are no longer a girl or a boy, but you are also not yet a man or a woman. You are constantly trying to process who you have been, denouncing that identity and now learning who you are going to be as an adult. In this phase, you are simultaneously expected to behave like a child while taking on adult roles. Some psychologists therefore say that the formation of youth culture is an attempt to adopt an identity that reconciles these two conflicting expectations.

Parsons (1951) says that adolescence is a time when young people are transitioning from reliance on parents to autonomy. In this transitory state, you start to depend more on your friends and less on your parents therefore as the youth, you form your own little society – your own culture. This is a much needed transition and a normal process in your journey to adulthood.

By the end of your teens, you will have to take away that dependency on your friends to now become a fully independent

human being. Burlingame (1970) restated Parsons' hypothesis saying that *“adolescents replace parents with the peer group, and that this reliance on the peer group diminishes as youth enter adulthood and take on adult roles.”*

As a teenager, you are going to have to achieve some level of independence to achieve some maturity. The types of independence will be discussed in a later chapter of this book. It is a contradictory process really; on one hand, compulsory schooling keeps you socially and economically dependent on your family and friends. On the other hand, you need to achieve some sort of independence in order to participate in the market economy of modern society. As a means of coping up with these contrasting aspects of teenage life, you will most likely create independence through behaviour –particularly the leisure-oriented activities that you do with your fellow youth.

Obviously, your choice of your leisure activities may not always be approved by your elders, as they should be, because in most cases, these choices are morally incorrect. Nowadays, you find teenagers who are drinking, smoking, vandalism, engaging in sexual relations and these things have adults worried. For decades, adults have worried that youth subcultures were the root of moral degradation and changing values in younger generations. Researchers have characterised youth culture as embodying values that are "in conflict with those of the adult world". These perceptions have led many adults to believe that adolescents hold different values than older generations and to perceive youth culture as an attack on the morals of current society.

Despite the attitudes of many adults, most evidence suggests that youth problems are not a reflection of different morals held by younger generations. Multiple studies have found that as adolescents, we hold views that are similar to our parents'. There may also be ignorance on our part as youth regarding how our attitudes are as compared to those of our peers and parents. Most students rate their attitudes as falling somewhere between their parents' more conservative attitudes and their peers' more liberal attitudes. This is because as teenagers, we believe that our friends are more liberal than they really are.

If adolescents' values are similar to their parents', then you ask why adults around you insist that adolescents inhabit a separate world with different values. The main reason for this is that the similarities between adolescent and adult values are relatively invisible compared to the differences in behaviour between these two groups. The way young people dress, the music they listen to, and their language are often more apparent than the values they hold. The mistake we make is assuming that what we do is representative of our values. This is in most cases true, but not always.

The adults in your life may also falsely believe that youth's assertion of independence in exterior aspects of their life represents a manifestation of a different value system. In reality, sports, language, music, clothing and dating tend to be superficial ways of expressing autonomy – meaning that they can be adopted without compromising one's beliefs or values. Of course, there are some areas in which adolescents' assertion of autonomy can cause



long-term consequences like substance use and sexual activity; therefore, you would not blame your family for expressing their concerns.

The impact of youth culture on deviance and sexual behaviour still has a lot of consequences. It is then important to realise why you are associated with the culture you are associated with. Research demonstrates that many factors may influence youth to engage in high-risk behaviours – which include, lack of stable role models, heightened family stresses, weakened emotional bonds between parents and their children, lowered levels of social capital and social control, and a lack of hope in ones future.

It is the knowledge of these things and yourself at large that will help you shape who you will become as an adult. The moment you know the cause of a problem in your life, any further pursuit of that problem is now a personal choice. You can never say you did not know better.

Teen culture may also have benefits for you as the adolescent. Contrary to popular belief, the right grouping of friends could actually lead you in the right direction. For example, most teens in fact report that their friends pressure them *not* to use drugs or engage in sexual activity. I certainly hope that in and by the end of your teens, you are one of the good few, pressing yourself and your peers in the right direction.

Youth culture also has an impact on the society at large. I believe you have heard of concepts like “capitalising on the youth vote”. For politicians to do this, they must understand the youth culture

of the generation they are working with. Young people can be a powerful force in precipitating change in society. Take for example, the fight for academic freedom at Chancellor College, the University of Malawi in 2011-2012; College students riled up the whole country just to put their feet down and demand their academic freedom. It is a strong and powerful thing to do, being able to stand up for what you believe in - Youth Culture can help you do that.

Last and most notable of the Youth Culture theories is Gunnar Heinsohn's (1987) theory of the youth bulge. According to this theory, an especially large population especially males, is associated with social unrest, war, and terrorism. The rationale that Heinsohn gives is that these population trends leave many people unable to find a prestigious places in society, so they turn their attention to creating change in society.

However, it does not necessarily need to be war or terror, but if you do not find your place in society or find something you believe is not good for your society, it is your place to take a stand against that thing.

### **The role of the internet in Cultural Identity**

You would think that the internet and cultural identity have possibly nothing to do with each other. But we are living in a time where the youth and almost everyone use the internet as an extension of the expressive dimension. I am certain that you have at least one Social Media page where you talk about yourself – be it things you like or the values you hold. If you are creative, you

design content and make it available to others and assess others reactions to it – in a way attaining some social approval. On channels like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr, the youth speak of their daily routines and lives.

With each post, image or video you upload, you have the possibility of asking yourselves who you are. You also look at other people's social media and find the ones that are more like you. I have had a friend who calls me her kindred soul, all off of social media. You see the things someone posts and you say “Yes! That is so me!” You then negotiate your identity and create senses of belonging, putting the acceptance and censure of others to the test- an essential mark of the process of identity construction. We all at a point argue that we do not need society's validation. This is even more prominent if you have had a sense of rejection by society before – be it adults or your peers.

It is normal to ask yourself about what you think of yourself, how you see yourself personally, and especially, how others see you. On the basis of these questions, you make decisions which, through a long process of trial and error, shape your identity.

The internet on one hand enables young people to explore and perform various roles and personifications while on the other, the virtual forums – some of them highly attractive, vivid and absorbing – could present a risk to the construction of a stable and viable personal identity. I mean think of your friends who have spent the entirety of the past two years surfing twitter. Worse still, imagine if it was you!

Addiction to the internet was a personal battle at a point in time. I would spend my day on Twitter talking to people I don't know and posting song lyrics of the songs that I was listening to. The internet can be highly addictive and you can spend so much time wasting your energies. I made the very drastic decision of deleting my twitter account when I was 20. I may have gone through a slight depression but it has definitely saved me so much time since. I use my Instagram to follow people that inspire me to get off my phone and actually go and do things. If my career demands it, I may someday make a comeback to Twitter too but I will be able to use it right this time.

## **Reading Culture**

There are so many types of culture you should take it upon yourself to discover, but the last one from me is the reading culture. I once read an article that enraged me as a black woman. It may apply to people of all races but I was specifically concerned as a black person. It was written anonymously so I should believe there are copyright issues. It goes like this:

### ***Blacks Don't Read***

*THEY ARE STILL OUR SLAVES.*

*We can continue to reap profits from the Blacks without the effort of physical slavery. Look at the current methods of containment that they use on themselves: IGNORANCE, GREED, and SELFISHNESS.*

*Their IGNORANCE is the primary weapon of containment. A great man once said, "The best way to hide something from Black people is to put it in a*

*book.” We live now in the Information Age. They have gained the opportunity to read any book on any subject through the efforts of their fight for freedom, yet they refuse to read.*

*There are numerous books readily available at Borders, Barnes & Noble, and Amazon.com, not to mention their own Black Bookstores that provide solid blueprints to reach economic equality (which should have been their fight all along), but few read consistently, if at all.*

*GREED is another powerful weapon of containment. Blacks, since the abolition of slavery, have had large amounts of money at their disposal. Last year they spent 10 billion dollars during Christmas, out of their 450 billion dollars in total yearly income (2.22%). Any of us can use them as our target market, for any business venture we care to dream up, no matter how outlandish, they will buy into it. Being primarily a consumer people, they function totally by greed. They continually want more, with little thought for saving or investing. They would rather buy some new sneaker than invest in starting a business. Some even neglect their children to have the latest Tommy or FUBU. And they still think that having a Mercedes, and a big house gives the “Status” or that they have achieved the American Dream.*

*They are fools! The vast majority of their people are still in poverty because their greed holds them back from collectively making better communities. With the help of BET, and the rest of their black media that often broadcasts destructive images into their own homes, we will continue to see huge profits like those of Tommy and Nike. (Tommy Hilfiger has even jeered them, saying he doesn't want their money, and look at how the fools spend more with him than ever before!). They'll continue to show off to each other while we build solid communities with the profits from our businesses that we market to them.*

*SELFISHNESS, ingrained in their minds through slavery, is one of the major ways we can continue to contain them. One of their own, Dubois said that there was an innate division in their culture. A “Talented Tenth” he called it. He was correct in his deduction that there are segments of their culture that has achieved some “form” of success. However, that segment missed the fullness of his work. They didn’t read that the “Talented Tenth” was then responsible to aid the Non-Talented Ninety Percent in achieving a better life. Instead, that segment has created another class, a Buppie class that looks down on their people or aids them in a condescending manner. They will never achieve what we have. Their selfishness does not allow them to be able to work together on any project or endeavour of substance. When they do get together, their selfishness lets their egos get in the way of the goal. Their so-called help organizations seem to only want to promote their name without making any real change in their community. They are content to sit in conferences and conventions in our hotels, and talk about what they will do, while they award plaques to the best speakers, not the best doers. Is there no end to their selfishness? They steadfastly refuse to see that “TOGETHER EACH ACHIEVES MORE (TEAM)! They do not understand that they are no better than each other because of what they own. In fact, most of those Buppies are but one or two pay-checks away from poverty. All of which is under the control of our pens in our offices and our boardrooms.*

*Yes, will continue to contain them as long as they refuse to read, continue to buy anything they want, and keep thinking they are “helping” their communities by paying dues to organizations which do little other than hold lavish conventions in our hotels.*

*By the way, don’t worry about any of them reading this letter, remember,*

*‘THEY DON’T READ!!!!’*

- *Anonymous*

I put this for you here, so unlike the expectations of the person who wrote this, you would read it. If you are feeling angry, empowered and driven after reading this article, I am with you. If you are feeling broken and like giving up after reading this, I am also with you.

Even though the tone of this letter/article is rude and some would argue unnecessary, it is true! I know some many of my peers that say they do not read. I have some friends that will even complain about a caption on social media if it is more than two sentences long. The age of everything simplified and instant gratification, can you blame them?

I cannot speak for other cultures and races, but I definitely know that a good percentage of my black brothers and sisters do not read. So if you are of African descent, I am very impressed by you having come this far and taking on a reading habit. It is definitely essential in personal growth. Everything you want to know in this life is ALWAYS a book away. You may think you are going through a new type of hell, only to find out after picking up a book that someone has walked your path before. You better yet learn how to deal with your type of hell.

Lana Winter Hebert (2016) gives 10 reasons why you should read every single day.

When was the last time you read a book, or a substantial magazine article? Do you get all your information from online – be it from tweets, Facebook updates, or Instagram? If you're one of countless people who don't make a habit of reading regularly (which indeed are countless), you are missing out. Reading has a significant number of benefits, and Lana Winter Herbert gives us just 10 of them:

### **1. Mental Stimulation**

Like any other muscle in the body, the brain requires exercise to keep it strong and healthy. Not only studying, but also doing activities that keep the brain active doing puzzles and playing games such as chess have also been found to be helpful with cognitive stimulation.

### **2. Stress Reduction**

A well-written novel can transport you to other realms, while an engaging article will distract you and keep you in the present moment, letting tensions drain away and allowing you to relax.

### **3. Knowledge**

Everything you read fills your head with new bits of information. The more knowledge you have, the better-equipped you are to tackle the challenge you face. You might lose everything else – your job, your possessions, your money, even your health, but knowledge can never be taken from you.

### **4. Vocabulary Expansion**



The more you read, the more words you gain exposure to, and they'll inevitably make their way into your everyday vocabulary. Lana says that being articulate and well-spoken is of great help in any profession, and knowing that you can speak to higher-ups with self-confidence can be an enormous boost to your self-esteem. It could even aid in your career, as those who are well-read, well-spoken, and knowledgeable on a variety of topics tend to get promotions more quickly (and more often) than those with smaller vocabularies and lack of awareness of literature, scientific breakthroughs, and global events. It also helps you learn a new language.

## **5. Memory Improvement**

When you read a book, you are basically getting to know people. You have to remember an assortment of characters, their backgrounds, ambitions, history, and nuances, as well as the various arcs and sub-plots that weave their way through every story. That's a fair bit to remember, but brains are marvellous things and can remember these things with relative ease.

## **6. Stronger Analytical Thinking Skills**

Have you ever read an amazing mystery novel, and solved the mystery yourself before finishing the book? If so, you were able to put critical and analytical thinking to work by taking note of all the details provided and sorting them out to determine the mystery.

That same ability to analyse details also comes in handy when it comes to critiquing the plot; determining whether it was a well-written piece, if the characters were properly developed, if the

storyline ran smoothly, etc. Should you ever have an opportunity to discuss the book with others, you'll be able to state your opinions clearly, as you've taken the time to really consider all the aspects involved.

## **7. Improved Focus and Concentration**

In our internet-crazed world, attention is drawn in a million different directions at once as we multi-task through every day. In a single 5-minute span, the average person will divide their time between working on a task, checking email, chatting with a couple of people (via gchat, skype, etc.), keeping an eye on twitter, monitoring their smartphone, and interacting with co-workers. This type of ADD-like behaviour causes stress levels to rise, and lowers our productivity. I know it takes so much discipline and focus on my part to be able to put my phone down and sometimes disconnect my computer from Wi-Fi and just read. It is not easy, therefore even though I tell people to do better, I do not necessary look down on people that fail to read.

When you read a book, all of your attention is focused on the story—the rest of the world just falls away, and you can immerse yourself in every fine detail you're absorbing. Lana says, try reading for 15-20 minutes before school or work, and you'll be surprised at how much more focused you are once you get to the office.

## **8. Better Writing Skills**

I always say I started writing because I spent the first 10 years of my life reading, thanks to my parents.

Lana further explains that reading goes hand-in-hand with the expansion of your vocabulary: exposure to published, well-written work has a noted effect on one's own writing, as observing the cadence, fluidity, and writing styles of other authors will invariably influence your own work. In the same way that musicians influence one another, and painters use techniques established by previous masters, so do writers learn how to craft prose by reading the works of others.

## **9. Tranquillity**

In addition to the relaxation that accompanies reading a good book, it's possible that the subject you read about can bring about immense inner peace and tranquillity. Take for example your friends who always rush to find the bible when they are going through a hardship. Reading spiritual texts can lower blood pressure and bring about an immense sense of calm. When I am not feeling good, I opt to search for poems on Pinterest relating to my situation. First, it helps me get in touch with what is really wrong with me to assist the search engine to give me the right content. When I do find the content, I feel better knowing that I am not the first and only person going through what I am going through. Reading self-help books has been shown to help people suffering from certain mood disorders and mild mental illnesses.

## **10. Free Entertainment**

I still have not yet connected a television in my house – partly because I do not have the money to do it but also because I do not

really need it. Why? Because I have so many books that I have not yet read and frankly, they are way better!

If you cannot afford books, Lana says, you can visit your local library and bask in the glory of the countless tomes available there for free. Libraries have books on every subject imaginable, and since they rotate their stock and constantly get new books, you'll never run out of reading materials. Personally, I am a sucker of second-hand bookshops! A dollar a book, Yes! I do not always approve of this, but if you really can't find these two means, most books are available in PDF or ePub format so you can read them on your e-reader, iPad, or your computer screen. You can find these books anywhere online if you look hard enough.

Lana argues that there's a reading genre for every literate person on the planet, and whether your tastes lie in classical literature, poetry, fashion magazines, biographies, religious texts, young adult books, self-help guides, street lit, or romance novels, there's something out there to capture your curiosity and imagination. Reading truly replenishes your soul. So step away from your daily habits and indulge in a new good read.

Now you have 10 reasons to pick up another book once you are done with this one, and hopefully pick up a lifetime habit of reason. And the next time someone tries to look cool and tells you that they do not read, you can give them 10 good reason why they should, courtesy of Lana Winter Herbert. Maybe then can we change the narrative to "Black Do Read" and we are definitely not slaves but capable of writing our own story now.

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## Chapter 6. FAMILY

### Definition

#### ***Relative***

*A person connected by blood or marriage.*

I consider family members/relatives as friends that we are connected to by birth. They are friends that are God-given. As such I believe that all relationships, especially those with relatives, should be handled as those with friends, while acknowledging that blood is definitely thicker and therefore must always come first.

I could not call myself a perfect relative. I have some of the most outlandish flaws when it comes to personal relationships.

I have, however, learnt that where family is concerned, much like friendship – and any type of relationship really, it only matters who is there and who never left. These are my most important principles:

1. Show up.
2. Be present.

I do not come from a big immediate family. I can't say I wish I did... maybe at some point in my life but certainly not now. I have one father, one mother, one sister and one brother. I have only one of each. I consider this a blessing – rarely ever a curse. My sister and I sometimes feel sorry for the rest of our family for having to deal with more than one girl in the family (yikes!).

I come from however a large extended family. My grandmother on my father's side had 5 surviving children who went ahead to have more than 20 children and about the same number of great grandchildren. My grandfather on my father's side had two wives which then gives me even more uncles, aunties, cousins, nieces and nephews. I am the first grandchild to my grandmother on my mother's side. She had 7 children, 10 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren so far.

My extended family is very close and I am grateful for this. It gives me more people to relate to and give love to.

When it comes to family, I have learnt this: The simplest things matter. When I was younger my mother always said I invested more in the family I made outside my home (she said with a bitterness I was too young to understand), but being beyond 20, I understands just that I went seeking validation when I did not find it right where I was coming from – and stayed there when I did find it; at least for as long as it lasted.

Family is God given because God knew we would need somebody. The biggest desire every human has is to feel accepted, to be seen – to be loved. The sooner we understand this, the better family members, the better friends, the better acquaintances we will be.

The most fundamental thing to my change by the end of my teens was taking responsibility. It was deciding to stop playing the victim in my own life and turn my situation around, whatever the cost. That was the major transition from my teens to my twenties.

It was the transition from wondering why my mother and father were not always the perfect parents, to the decision of being a better daughter – the daughter they needed. It was stepping back from trying to get love out of my siblings, to giving love to them the way I knew best.

In life you get what you give. It may not be immediately, but eventually, you get what you give.

### **Mother Daughter Relationships**

It would not make sense for me to talk about family and not begin with the most important relationship in my life – the one I have with my mother, the woman who gave me life. If you have a perfect relationship with your mother, you may as well skip to the next segment – but if you are much like me and occasionally get in a life for life battle with your ma, then stick with me.

We describe each other in many ways, my mother and I, but this one way is significant:

*“My biggest critic, my biggest cheerleader”.*

My mother and I are best friends and worst enemies, and that pretty much sums up our entire relationship. If I send a picture of myself to my mom, she will note every single thing that is wrong with the picture and then comment “gorgeous”... as the world has it – constructive criticism. Nobody wants perfection more for me as much as my mother, and that with the best intentions. She could care less how this makes me feel. She has the best intentions at heart and I have learnt that intentions are all that ever matter in



this world. There is no one on this earth that has loved me like my mother. There is no one on this earth that has hurt me like my mother. There is no one on this earth that has supported me like my mother. I am almost certain she would have the exact same to say about me.

We do not have any extraordinary mother-daughter relationship. We are as cliché as mother-daughter relationships come. We love, we laugh, we cry, we fight. We fight. We also shop a whole lot (my father would argue a little too much) but that is a story for another day. I stress her out, she pains my soul. I cannot imagine this life without my mother. I do not even want to try. We cannot live without each other. We work that way.

I keep saying we fight. I bet you are wondering what kind of fights these are. Oh you know – nothing out of the usual. The same old

“Why can you not do the dishes?”

“Why do you not wake up when the sun is up?”

“Why must you lie to me?”

“Why did you steal my airtime?”

and a bit of an words and emotions exchanged later – some broken hearts, both mine and her own.

*“The words rolled off your tongue.*

*You paused first,*

*then you took your aim.*

*You meant for it to hurt me.*

*VICTORY for you!!!*

*It hurt my heart so bad.*

*I do not even want to start crying*

*Because it will be difficult to stop.*

*This is the mother/ daughter relationship we have.*

*It should not have to hurt.”*

**– Gail Streje**

At 20, my mother told me that I hated her. She almost looked like she believed it with her whole heart. I paused for a while... really trying to process how she could ever think that. I could imagine what the hurt we had caused each other over the years could have done... sure I had deliberately forgotten to give her back her change a few times. Yes I will never be able to wake up when the sun rises. Most times when words got the best of us and we did say some very hurtful things. But hate... hate never came to my mind.

For the first time in my life, or at least actively so, I stepped out of my relationship with my mother to really examine from the outside, what I could do better. For the first time I stopped looking at my own hurt and started to see how my actions could have affected the woman I loved most. I began to analyse her, and assess her. I wanted to get to know my mother. I mean really get to know my mother.

You see we think we know someone because we have known them all our lives – but we never fully know someone until we have lived their story and live their truth.

So then began a quest of me analysing everything she had told me about herself. I tried to place myself in her shoes, how exactly she must have felt at different points of her life – basically what made her become this woman she was today, my mother.

Slowly, I began to understand way too different from how I ever understood her. Growing up my sister and I always thought our mother was simply just difficult. She would come home and the way we knew mother was home – we heard shouting. The moment we heard her car pull up in the drive way we would be jumping up and down rushing to fluff the pillows in the living room, check that we had made our beds, just pretty much verify that everything was as mother loved it – so she would not shout, you know. Of course, she always found a reason to shout. A sock out of place, someone hadn't brushed their teeth... something! I later learnt that this was the reality to most of my peers' mothers. However, to me, as was any other mother anyway – she was just a difficult woman. It took me having my own house and having my own arrangement that I finally understood why certain things have to be a certain way in the home.

But that was not enough. I had to dig deeper... way before she even owned a home, or had people to shout out. I saw a young lady much like myself. I saw a strong woman doing her best to get by even with all the odds stacked against her. I saw a woman who

had learnt to be alone and be strong for herself. From my own experience, I began to understand why she had become so hard-hearted. It was not love she did not have. I have never for a day doubted my mother's love for me. I, however, now understood that my mother was a guarded person – much like myself.

My sister and I in recent years have noticed, and even commended my mother that she has changed overtime. She became soft. She was happy. Her change was no coincidence. A few factors came to play. Time had had its impact on her. First and most important, she acknowledged that she could assess herself and do better (something most of us really struggle to do). Secondly, everything around her was changing as well. Her children were growing up – from the once senseless children to now people she could rely on. We became her friends, and even though we had our good and bad days... she knew she could depend on us and that for, possibly, the first time in a long time, she had best friends. She was no longer alone.

Furthermore, things and people she cared about most changed – I being one of them. Once again I say, in life, you get what you give. When I gave my mother hell, I got back hell. When I give her paradise, I get paradise back. My first mistake in life was believing that my parents had to be perfect. The world welcomes us that way I suppose. We see our parents as gods and we expect them to be absolutely wiser and available to tell us exactly what it is that we need to hear. It took me time to realise that my mother was just as human as I was, to appreciate and acknowledge that she was also affected by the world just as well as I was.

I had held my mother subconsciously accountable for most of my pain. “I was just a child. She should have known better. She should not have shouted at me. She should have loved me better”. I wanted her to take care of me so bad, I did not realise she did not have anyone to take care of her but her. It took her acknowledging my pain for me to truly feel that she stood with me.

My mother is the strongest woman I know, and even this is an understatement. What she has survived could have broken me down a very long time ago. My biggest fear, as is any other child is – losing my mother. I cannot imagine living in a world my mother did not exist. I would hate to even have to miss my mother.

Through the tears, the laughter, the hurt, the pain, the joy, the triumphs, mother daughter relationships will never even be close to perfect, but they are a sisterhood as all sisterhoods come.

So love that woman. Make it your mission to understand that woman. She is strong. She is weak. She is as human as you are. That is the best kind of love you will ever receive. Love her while you still have time... love her while she still has time.

**Ma,**

**Thanks for being everything a mother should be,**

**And then more.**

**I am eternally grateful.**

“You are my wife, the mother of my children” he would say to my mother. My mother, she changed her name as soon as I was born and became “*Mayi a Ntha*”. Everyone around me calls her that. I never stopped for a second to question that. She is my mother, right alongside my father, two roles they beautifully dressed each other with and they wear them so well; motherhood, fatherhood, parenthood.

### ***Father Daughter relationships***

The other most important relationship in my life is the one I have with my father. Unlike the friendship relationship I have with my mother, my father is my absolute pillar.

*“You are my daughter, my Nthanda”*

- ***Daddy***

“I’m a family man” he has always said.

That is how I will forever remember my father.

“You three are my sole purpose on this earth” he would speak, looking at my brother, my sister and I.

He doesn’t have to speak it for it to be true. I see it in his eyes, in his very being. He doesn’t have to tell me he will protect me for me to believe it. I believe that with my soul, like I believe that the sun will rise every morning, and that the rain will come every year. I never stopped for a second to question why that is so... because it simply is... factual, if you may.

I recall one morning around *1am* as my friend woke me up on that cold bus and told me, “You are home”. I woke up from my slumber and checked my pink wristwatch that my father had gotten me at the beginning of that term. It couldn’t be. It was only 1 in the morning. I always got to that juncture at 3am, and if not, 4. I opened my window and saw very familiar surroundings. Indeed, I was here. This was where I got off the bus into my father’s car. I looked at the door for my father’s face, none in sight. I looked around for my father’s car, nowhere to be seen. But of course, it was only 1 in the morning. My father would always be here by 3am waiting for me to return from boarding school. For the first time, I was scared of this place. For the first time, this did not feel like home. It did not feel like home because my father was not outside the bus waiting for me. You see, home was more than a place for me. Home was the presence of my father.

I took that for granted you see, how my father takes care of me... the way he prioritises my life and how our family is all he lives for. To me, that was how a man should be. To me, it was, as you may, a fact. Today I realise, we base our facts as children from what we see around us. From our parents, our friends, their friends, those we come in contact with.

I got off the bus trembling a little, and found the next landline to reach my father. I have known my father’s phone number by heart for as long I can remember. I recall the Saturday mornings when my mother and father would sit my sister and I in the living room and ask us to recite their phone numbers as we had done our alphabets and multiplication tables. I did so with pride; getting

better and better by each day. I took pride in knowing their phone numbers by heart.

Waking up from his slumber; I could hear my father's voice from the other end of the line, half asleep and half scared for my dear life. He too could not comprehend how I had gotten here so early. My home, you see, was nowhere near here. My home... or house, nearly 2 hours and perhaps a hundred kilometres away. I will never understand how he managed to get from home to where I was in a matter of an hour or less. To me, then at least, it was how it was supposed to be. He had to show up, he had to come and get me, he had to be here. He did so over and over and it has been the way he has lived his life for as long as I have known him – Family first, always. I never stopped for a second to ask myself why I believed it so. To me, that was my father – my protector and my owner. I belonged to him, never alone. He proved it countless times, and I never for a day thought any less.

Growing up, I saw the world as it is. The facts I once believed, now diluted. I met men, countless. Some great men, and some disgraceful men. Men that prioritised their drinks, their cars, their money, their wit. I failed to comprehend how this could be a man; because the first man I knew, at the top of his hierarchy of belongings I knew he had a wife, two daughters and a son (his words). For the first time, I saw that it was not factual that he had to choose to be a family man. It was his nobility and choice of decency that he chose a life where he would be the best man for his children. It was a decency he had inherited from his father.



I left my father's home with many lessons but this stands most important; family over everything. And if anyone must ever ask me to describe a family man, I will never for a second even stop to think again; my father. The best family man I ever knew.

## **Siblings**

The ways in which I love my sister and my brother are utterly different. My sister is my best friend. She is the one person I have had for as long as I can remember. Once again I say, I am lucky to have only one as I do not do well with favourites. My brother is different - eight years my junior, I have always had a motherly/caretaker relationship with him. I take care of and protect him. He listens to and respects me... and there is hell to pay when these lines are crossed. As long as I can remember he has been my baby, and I do not think he will ever fully understand how I view him.

Siblings are by far the best of God's blessings to us. My sister came into my life when I was only 2 years and 4 months old. My mother said I called her "baby *wanga*" and she has remained that to this day. I also have a motherly relationship with her but she is closer to my heart. She is the one person that has experience as closely to me as anyone has. By her I have learnt to understand her as uniquely as she is. We fight like all normal siblings. We fall out and make amends constantly. One thing I have made certain is that there is never a wedge between us two that lasts too long and scars

too deep. It is a constant effort on both our ends to always move past little things and that is what keeps a relationship strong.

My brother is like my son. The pride of being a first born is that you are a deputy parent. He looks up to me a lot and I constantly have to make sure that I am setting the correct example on how to be a human, how to be a man. I have to make sure that the men I bring around me are the men I would love my little brother to turn out like in life. When I meet a man, I have two questions in my heart – and those are whether my father would approve of this man in my life, but also whether I would be proud if this how my little brother turned out.

I love my brother with all my heart but my relationship with him is very protective and advisory. I suppose those are the two types of relationships we have with our siblings depending on the age difference. They either grow to be our best of friends or they become our children/parents. Either way, those are beautiful relationships that should be guarded and protected.

There are more things I would have loved to write about. I would have loved to write about how to deal with parent's divorcing. I would have loved to advise you on how to deal with the death of a parent or the death of a sibling. Unfortunately that is not my story to tell and I am very grateful to the fact that I have not yet experienced those things. You see we tend to take for granted what we have. Even amidst all the calamities you may be facing within your family, there are certain bits of your life that are still

good and you need to cherish and nourish them. Say kind words to the people you love and make sure they know that you love them.

And if you are dealing with hardships that are unique to your story, make sure you give yourself room to fully experience those things, hurt, cry and heal through all of it. It may be painful in the moment, but just like all things in this life including the very life itself – it is all temporary. Now like all relationships in this life, it is important to treat your family as friends. The foundation of any great relationship is a good friendship. To be a good relative, you will need to know how to be a good friend.

## Chapter 7. FRIENDS

### **Definition**

#### ***Friend***

*A person with whom one has a bond of mutual affection, typically one exclusive of sexual or family relations.*

You have probably heard this before and I will say it again,

“You are the average of your 5 closest friends”.

Tricky when I must describe my closest friends – as they are all vastly different. It would be almost impossible to thinking about even creating an average of them. Thinking about it – they have a lot of things in common but gladly, nothing to do with lifestyle. I adore their unique lifestyles, but more importantly I am drawn to their characters and how they remain true to their nature.

They are all smart. All my closest friends are college graduate, so there I suppose you can define me as an average of them. Similarly to all their other attributes. They all know how to respect differences. They are good to all kinds of people. They are honest. They all are kind and genuine. They have dreams and goals. At the core, I could say my friends are all the same.

I have picked up my set of the humans I call friends over life. Some we have grown together, others fallen apart in time.

I remember my first friend. Her name is Vanessa. There was nothing particularly special about our friendship. We never had to click really. Our parents were close friends. We lived in the same neighbourhood and were almost the same age. It was only logical that we would be friends. I naturally trusted her as we were both under the age of 5. I do not remember many facts about our friendship. I have no idea what we even ever talked about at the age of 3 or 4, but I know that for a long part of my childhood, I missed that innocent friendship we had. Growing up, kids became mean. I had to work harder to fit in. At times I was betrayed, most times hurt – and every single time I longed for the innocence of the friendship that Vanessa and I had.

It took me a long time and a few untruthful friendships to realise that it was not the exact friendship with Vanessa I missed so much but the basis of it. My friendship with Vanessa was built on truth. We did not know much but we knew each other's truths. We had very little truth, which made it very easy to connect.

It was not based on social status, how well we fit in with others, how rich our parents were, how smart the other was and so much more. However, as I grew older, as I made friends, I realised that it began to matter. From about age 8 to your teens (some beyond that, which I hope by the end of this book is not your case), we have this huge desire to be accepted. We want to be associated with the coolest kids in school. We want to be among the children that are known to have richer parents. We want to be the beautiful ones, the talented ones, the smart ones. We simply want to hang with the most accepted group of children. You make friends with

people you cannot even stand, people that are mean to you, people that do not get your story simply because you want to be accepted.

I made my healthiest friendships in University. It took me way too long, perhaps until I was no longer a teen to know what to look for in a friend. It was not any of the things I had valued before.

I made friends that never liked me in the beginning. I made friends with people I had never imagined myself associating with. I made friends with beautiful souls. Souls that could speak their truth, express their hurt, be entirely honest about their beings, not only with me but also themselves. By the time I was no longer a teen, I did not have a single person close to me I could have even considered a fake friend. I deeply desired to have known the qualities of a true friend by the end of my teens.

You would love to make friends with people who will be truthful to you when you hurt them. People whom you do not have to question if they would defend your honour in your absence. People whom you want to be there for because you know exactly how much hurt they have endured and you understand the magic of someone simply saying “I’ll be there”.

By the end of your teens I hope you focus on being a good friend, instead of being an opportunist looking for things that your “friends” can do for you. You want to be the friend that they need. The law of attraction is a fundamental theory. You attract whatever energy you put out into the world. If you are genuinely good to people (the right people), even if it takes some time, they will eventually be good to you – but do good without expecting

anything in return. If the good comes back to you, keep those friends – they are your gems. If they do not, you lose nothing. Learn the art of letting people go – not dramatically but just releasing them back into the universe. I am inclined to be cliché and say “If you love someone, let them go.” I use this principle with almost every person in my life – love them and leave them free. If they love you back, they will always stick around and those who do, even if it is only one, are everyone you need to get by. You do not need the weight of fake friends or people that feel some type of weight for having to be there for you.

Now when you are a friend to someone, or dare call yourself a friend to someone, you want to make sure you are a good one. You might be a terrible friend and not even realise it.

When you choose to be a friend to someone, you have to learn their love language. Yes friendship is love, and love is a language. As is any language, it is also spoken differently by different people based on where they come from and what they have been exposed to. You cannot be a friend to all your friends in the exact same way – or the way you believe you should be a friend. You have to be the type of friend each single friend yours needs in their lives – an honest, truthful and reliable friend.

Sometimes our actions and the words that escape our mouths stop going through a filter. Then eventually we're not even conscious of how horrible we are as a person, friend or love. You have to acknowledge that each person is different. Some people are more sensitive than others. As a friend it is your duty to make sure your

friends are not too sensitive around you and that they are comfortable enough to know you would never intend to hurt them – but also never going beyond some boundaries.

We get so used to our friends that we become insensitive to the things we say and do. Sure, that level of comfort can be a good thing, but at the same time a lot of ugliness can start leaking out. It could be a reflection of the person you really are. That would be with reference to your level of self-knowledge and self-healing as was highlighted in the self-love chapter.

As was mentioned, the law of attraction – before you dream of having good friends, dream of being a great friend. Speaking of how to be a better friend, first you must understand what qualities make up a bad friend.

### **Are you a good friend?**

A bad friend is not hard to spot. Vincent Nguyen (2016) in his article about being a good friend discusses some things you can use to check if you are a good or a bad friend. Below are the ones I found most fundamental:

#### ***1. You project your own negative qualities onto your friends.***

The law of attraction – The energy you put out, you attract.

In life you can assume that because you think in a certain way, your friends and others do too. An example is if you're prone to talking about others behind their back, thus, just because you do it, you'd assume everyone else does the same. This gets annoying and your friends do notice this.



***2. You criticise or blaming your friends for everything.***

You feel like nothing is your fault and you're always right. Everything wrong is because of other people around you. There is no way you are ever responsible for any wrong doing in your life. You are always the victim. Then you start letting your friends know, even non-verbally, how you feel about the situation. That is how you lose friends.

***3. You only spend time with your friends when you need something.***

I spoke of being an opportunistic friend. With you it is always about what YOU gain from interacting with your friends. It is rarely ever about them.

When you reach for the phone it's never to see how they're doing or to get together and have fun. There is always a reason to call or text. It becomes so habitual that every time you call or text, their response is "What do you need?" If that's a common response you get from multiple people then you've got a clear warning sign.

***4. You never think about how they may feel.***

Your words hurt like knives and you might not even know it (or care,) because you have a disregard for how they may feel. You don't stop to wonder how your decisions, actions, and words may affect what your friends think. Sometimes it's the *lack* of action that hurts them most. So many things to be mindful of! Are you losing track?

***5. You have the need to "one-up" them.***

Although this doesn't always mean you're a bad friend, it shows some flaws in character on your part. You could begin to wear down the friendship if the other person feels like you constantly show off or downplay their accomplishments. People have enough insecurities and self-esteem issues as is. Don't make them feel the same way around their own friends.

***6. You don't listen to what they have to say.***

Their opinions mean nothing to you and it's usually drowned out by your own stories. You fight for time to speak and when they are talking you're usually tapping your feet impatiently for your turn to talk. Oh and they know when you're pretending to listen. Tossing in a question to make it seem like you care is insincere. What's worse is when you ask them something only to interrupt them mid-answer so you can start talking.

***7. You never stick to your word.***

Come on. If you say you'll do something, don't go back on your word. Punctuality goes into this too. Don't be the person who is consistently an hour later than promised.

**How to be a better friend**

And obviously now having assessed yourself on whether you may be a bad friend, it is essential to learn how to fix those issues and how to become a better friend.

***1. Make sure your friends are okay the moment you sense something wrong.***

It can mean the world to your friends when you show you're concerned. Send them a text, a phone call, and if you can surprise them by showing up at their place when you sense something is wrong. Make an excuse to spend time with them. This doesn't mean you have to shove advice down their throat. It just means showing you want them to be okay.

Some people are very good at hiding their negative emotions. As a friend it is your role to learn when your friends are wearing a mask. Masks get heavy when you wear them for so long and sometimes you forget how to take it off. Having friends who can see right through you definitely lifts the weight of any heavy mask.

## ***2. Know when to be serious and when to be goofy.***

When it's time to be serious, you get down to business. No goofing off. No cheap attempt at being funny to avoid the real issues. I am grateful to my friend Wiza who is the goofiest person I know but knows when to be serious and will look at you dead in the eye and say "We really need to talk about things in your life" when she wants to be heard. We laugh and we joke around, but real issues must be addresses.

You may argue from time to time and that's all right. It's natural. Be mature and aim at finding common ground, or as I say, agree to disagree.

## ***3. Go the extra mile when they ask for help.***

When they ask for your opinion or help on something that means something. It means they value what you think. If someone hands

you an essay asking for you to help proofread or revise it then go the extra mile. Bust out a red pen and start marking it up like crazy. Show them you're as invested as they are. It means the world to your friends to know you care that much.

A friendship is in a way a committed relationship and it sucks when the other person doesn't put in effort to help when needed.

#### ***4. Don't give up on them during their darkest hours.***

You don't give up on your friends especially during hard times. If they're going through really difficult times then they may begin to close themselves off from you and your other friends. They'd say no to going out and hide from the world. This can be annoying and some people eventually they give up, but good friends keep trying.

#### ***5. Make them feel wanted.***

Show your friends you like being around them. Sometimes say it outright. "You're an awesome friend," "It's not as fun when you're not there," or "I like hanging out with you, you know?"

#### ***6. Assure them you have got their back (and mean it.)***

Feelings often times need to be expressed to be cemented. Remind them that you're friends for life by making sure they know you'll always be there. This means keeping in touch or being there to cheer them up when they've got it rough.

#### ***7. Understand and respect boundaries.***

Know that you don't have to be together 24/7. We all need personal space to recharge and don't always feel like hanging out with others. That doesn't mean that we don't like them. Good friends aren't pushy and don't get upset because of an occasional "no." In fact, good friends know how to pick up right where they left off no matter how long it's been since they last saw each other.

***8. Be honest and constructive when needed.***

There's a difference between being conscious of their feelings and letting them ruin themselves in the long-run. If they've developed a bad habit then kindly point it out and show that you are concerned. If they are picking up a bad habit, let them know you've noticed. And if you feel like criticisms are harsh, offer them tips on how to improve.

***9. Jump to the rescue when asked.***

We all get in unexpected trouble and it's good to know people who would jump to your rescue. This is one of the most things about friendship to me. Showing up! I got in a car accident early in the morning on my way to work about a year ago. I called someone I was close to at the moment and his response was "Oh that's too bad. Are you all right?" and that was the full effort from his end. I did not press any further. I texted another friend and his response was "Where are you?"

I was not feeling too well to respond but he knew that the next place I would possibly go was the hospital and he called again to let me know he was outside the hospital. He skipped work and helped me with everything that morning all the way to the police

station to make my statement, and then sorted out all the bills involved.

I am not saying you should go beyond your means to show up for your friends, but do what you possibly can. Make no excuses.

***10. Be okay with gaps in conversation.***

Silent gaps will naturally occur in a conversation. Be comfortable with them. Don't feel like you absolutely have to fill every single second with a sentence. It's okay to be comfortable and just enjoy each other's company.

***11. Be dependable (punctuality and keeping promises.)***

When you say you'll do something, be a person that sticks to your word. That means being punctual, not going back on your promises, and ensuring that you're viewed as a reliable friend. Being unreliable will make your friends think twice before asking you for something.

***12. Learn how to apologise.***

It takes a lot to admit you did something wrong. By this, I also learnt that it does not have to be your version of wrong. Sometimes we hurt our friends unintentionally. I have only had one falling out with my best friend Winnie and it took her cornering me in my room to actually talk about why I was hurt and saying "We need to get past this". Even when she had not intended to hurt me with her words, she had and it took her being the bigger person in the picture to address my feelings.

Do not be afraid of admitting to your friends that you messed up. When you are not clear, ask what is hurting your friends. It happens to the best of us. Someone who can swallow his or her pride and admit they're in the wrong is a great friend.

***13. Know how to show you're happy for them.***

It's easy to tell when someone is dishonest. "Wow, I'm so happy for you," with a non-eager face isn't very convincing. Let us be honest; we are selfish, naturally, as human beings. It is not easy being happy for other people, especially when things are not going as well for us. We want people to do well, just not better than us. As good friends, this may not be the healthiest approach. If your friends win, you win. Believe that truly. Be invested in their successes and show in your facial expressions that you really are happy.

Again, I have learnt this from Wiza. Wiza is that friend who is the happiest when everyone around her is doing amazing and her energy is unmistakable. She goes the extra mile to show that she is happy for you and that is how every good friend should be. Remember, the law of attraction!

***14. Show small gestures on occasion.***

It can be as simple as buying them something you thought they might like. First, it shows that you remember what they enjoy. Second, it shows that you were thinking of them. Third, you spent your hard-earned cash to let your friend know you like them. Isn't that what friendship is about?

***15. Start saying yes more often to your friends and make time for them.***

It's not a good feeling to be turned down by your friends. It's just so easy when you're "not feeling it", but make it a point to say yes more often to your friends when you can.

I am very guilty of failing to accommodate other people in my life. I will make up any excuse possible not to hang out with some friends. This does not mean that I do not love them. I simply wish to be alone and around no one most times. But this is obviously unhealthy especially in times when my friends actually need me.

Unless you're absolutely certain that there is no possibility of making room for your friends, you have no reason not to have time for your friends. It's easy to convince yourself you're too busy. Don't buy into your own stories. Always make time for them because it's easy to drift apart.

***16. Keep in touch and make sure you don't drift apart.***

Life goes on and everyone has their own thing to do. Sure, picking up where you left off may be easy for you, but it's just as easy to completely lose contact. It takes effort, especially when there's a lot of physical distance, to maintain a good friendship. It's a relationship that takes both sides to work.



## **Conflict Resolution**

I recently had a falling out with a friend, a falling out that I made peace with. This was a friendship of almost 4 years that had meant a lot to me. One would ask – if this friendship was so important to you, why did you let it go? Well, I had expected it to come to an end sooner or later. I guess we both did. Before I go on with this chapter, I want to make it clear that not all battles and not all friendships are worth fighting for. However, it should be your desire to know which ones are essential for your existence and well-being.

The falling out of that one friendship, I attributed it to the fact that our personalities were so similar such that it was so easy to clash. It was not about the one argument we had that one day. It was the entire friendship that was the issue. I am not one of those people who normally let a friendship go, but I let this one go because I knew that I was the only one between the two of us that saw the flaw in our friendship. You see, to solve any problem in a friendship, it is a two-way street.

Let us begin by acknowledging that friendships do matter.

Sometimes, it may seem easier to walk away from a friendship than address a serious conflict. But friendships are essential for every human being's well-being.

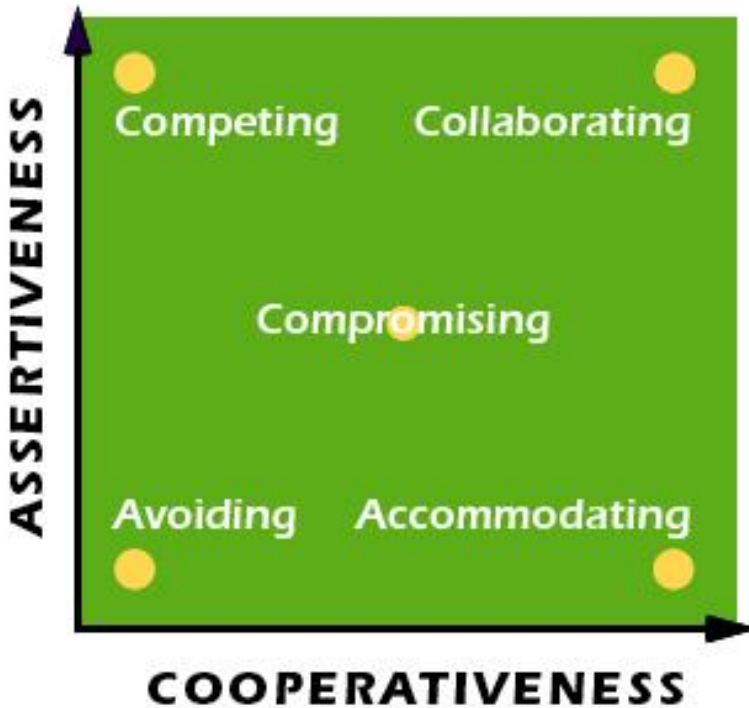
People need friends to thrive. Friendships provide a sense of connectedness. Friends help you to look at yourself in ways you might never have before. They shed light on your good and bad qualities and boost self-esteem. Their being able to see and highlight your weaknesses is important because if your friends are true, then you know their observations are simply objective and in no way mean to hurt your feelings. A true friend will in fact think of the kindest way to say the harshest things to you.

Friends help ease stress and hardship through laughter and fun times. They can help you get ahead. Friends stand by you in times of despair or grief and celebrate with you in times of good fortune and achievement. Friendships are enriching and worth the time and trouble.

Because no two individuals have exactly the same expectations and desires, conflict is a natural part of our interactions with others.

Now to resolve any conflict, I advise people to understand their personal and their friends' personality types. There is a self-assessment called the **Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument**, where participants identify which of five conflict-resolution styles they tend to embrace after taking the test. I learnt about this model at a Lions Club Conference a year ago. There are so many psychological tools and tests that I would advise you to take by the end of your teens for your personal growth and assessment. This here is one of them, as discuss by Wiedefield and created by **Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann**.

Thomas and Kilmann define five different modes for responding to conflict situations:



### *1. Competing*

“My way or the highway” style.

This person takes quick action, makes unpopular decisions, stands up for vital issues and protects himself.

A competitive person is assertive and uncooperative—an individual pursues his own concerns at the other person's expense. This is a power-oriented mode in which you use whatever power seems appropriate to win your own position—your ability to argue, your rank, or economic sanctions. Competing means

"standing up for your rights," defending a position which you believe is correct, or simply trying to win.

## ***2. Accommodating***

**“It would be my pleasure”** approach.

This person is reasonable, wants to create goodwill and keep the peace, and tends to retreat if pushed by others.

**Accommodating** is unassertive, but cooperative—the complete opposite of competing. When accommodating, the individual neglects his own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person; there is an element of self-sacrifice in this mode. Accommodating might take the form of selfless generosity or charity, obeying another person's order when you would prefer not to, or yielding to another's point of view.

### ***3. Avoiding***

**“I’ll think about it tomorrow”** strategy.

This type wants to avoid tension, and so is adept at sidestepping issues or buying time before making decisions.

**Avoiding** is unassertive and uncooperative—the person neither pursues his own concerns nor those of the other individual. Thus, s/he does not deal with the conflict. Avoiding might take the form of diplomatically sidestepping an issue, postponing an issue until a better time or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation.

### ***4. Collaborating***

“Two heads are better than one” methodology. This type is skilled at relationship-building, merging different perspectives and winning commitment from others.

**Collaborating** is both assertive and cooperative—the complete opposite of avoiding. Collaborating involves an attempt to work with others to find some solution that fully satisfies their concerns. It means digging into an issue to pinpoint the underlying needs and wants of the two individuals. Collaborating between two persons might take the form of exploring a disagreement to learn from each other's insights or trying to find a creative solution to an interpersonal problem.

### ***5. Compromising***

**“Let’s make a deal”** approach.

This type is good at finding temporary solutions to a conflict, especially when dealing with time constraints, even if the solution is not ideal.

**Compromising** is moderate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness. The objective is to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties. It falls intermediate between competing and accommodating. Compromising gives up more than competing but less than accommodating. Likewise, it addresses an issue more directly than avoiding, but does not explore it in as much depth as collaborating. In some situations, compromising might mean splitting the difference between the two positions, exchanging concessions, or seeking a quick middle-ground solution.

Each of us is capable of using all five conflict-handling modes. None of us can be characterised as having a single style of dealing with conflict. But certain people use some modes better than others and, therefore, tend to rely on those modes more heavily than others—whether because of temperament or practice.

Wiedefeld (2015) says that understanding the resolution style of each person involved in a conflict makes it easier to find a way to “get this person with this conflict strategy to deal with this person who has a different conflict strategy.”

Wiedefeld added that, people who have characteristics of several conflict-resolution styles may find it easier to adapt their own approach to accommodate others. However, those who are identified closely with just one conflict-resolution style may find that adaptation more difficult.

It is important to acknowledge, especially in friendship, that not everyone deals with conflicts in the same way. If you are going to resolve conflicts with your friends, you will have to understand them and the best way to do this is through effective communication.

Communication is the secret to a healthy, lasting friendship and the key to effective problem solving.

### **Effective communication**

Effective communication is about more than just exchanging information. It's about understanding the emotion and intentions behind the information, as well as being able to clearly convey a message. When you are listening, you need to listen in a way that you gain the full meaning of what's being said and makes the other person feel heard and understood.

Normally, as humans we seek to be heard. We do not really seek to listen to others. Even more so, when we feel that we are not being heard, we raise our walls so high and shun away even more from listening to our friends.

Effective communication involves two parts:

## ***1. Presenting information***

## ***2. Active listening.***

Without both, resolving conflict is near impossible, as is maintaining your friendships.

I will give you the same example of my friend and I. I am aware of how similar we are. Naturally, we both fall close to the competing type of personality. This means that it is always “My Way” on both our ends and never a compromise. It was for this reason that I always saw our friendship eventually coming to an end.

Because I was aware of this fact, I made it a point to usually be the one compromising in our friendship. I most times put aside my desire to be right, let her take the win and preserve the friendship. Most times I agreed to disagree because I knew that if we did not already agree, there would be no common ground with us. Our friendship lasted for as long as it did because for the most part we did agree. I knew that the day we disagreed, we would be over.

Eventually, we did have a big fight. I tried my best to calm the situation and assure her that if we both must be right, we would both lose. I then realised that she believed there would be a possible situation where I would look down on her for my personal gain – that I would hurt her just to come on top, and that was the day I stopped fighting to save our friendship.



My friends mean everything to me and I would be the last person to hurt them intentionally. If I did, I do my best to come forth and apologise. That is something you must always do in a friendship. You have to analyse if there is any slightest way you may have hurt your friend, and put aside your ego to apologise – even when you are also hurt. However, beyond saving friendships, it is also important to know what friends are worth saving. Some things simply eat away at your soul and build you in no way.

If your friendships do build you up and make you better, they are definitely worth fighting for. You will only be able to fight for your friendships through effective communication and as such, there are the communication skills you will need to master.

More than just the words you use, effective communication combines a set of 4 skills:

- 1. Engaged listening**
- 2. Nonverbal communication**
- 3. Managing stress in the moment**
- 4. Asserting yourself in a respectful way**

*When Speaking;*

- Think before speaking, know exactly what message you want to convey.
- Make sure your friend has your full attention and understands your meaning.

- Stay focused on the matter at hand.
- Be clear and precise.
- Listen to yourself speak.
- Be aware of your body movement, voice inflection, facial expressions and other nonverbal cues.

All these things can be misinterpreted and it is important for you to make it clear to your friends exactly what you mean when you speak.

*When listening:*

- Pay attention to what your friend is saying and acknowledge your interest and understanding in what your friend is saying.
- Listen for what is behind the words—like feelings and ideas.
- Do not interrupt, get angry or judge.

*When resolving conflict, keep these communication tips in mind:*

- Remain calm.
- Recognise when you are becoming defensive or too emotional.
- Do not blame or accuse each other.
- Focus on the issue at hand, not the way you are feeling toward each other.
- Explore underlying issues.

- Accept that each other's perspective is different, but *not* wrong.
- Be willing to apologise and forgive.

Friendship is a beautiful thing. Make sure you learn to make and keep the right friends by the end of your teens. Make sure you know how to be a good friend while understanding and staying away from the qualities of a bad friend. When hurt, learn to forgive. Most importantly, make sure you know how to resolve and get past conflicts.

Remember,           no           man           is           an           island.

## Chapter 8. LOVE ACTUALLY

*“You own everything that happened to you.*

*Tell your stories.*

*If people wanted you to write warmly about them,*

*They should have behaved better.”*

- **Anne Lamott**

My journey with love started as any little girl’s would, a lot of fairy tales as a young girl, a belief in prince charming, my first crush at probably 9 years old, my first kiss at 15, first boyfriend at 17 years old, first heart break at 19 – and here I am at 22, almost certain I am swearing off love, almost certain I no longer possess a heart. Too young to be done with love, don’t you think? Yet, here I am; young and almost broken beyond repair, or am I?

But first, how did we get here?

Before we get there, we must define **love**

My Cambridge Dictionary defines **Love** as

*“An intense feeling of deep affection.”*

I think love in itself is the most defined word in the world. There have been countless books written, simply just to define the four letter word “**Love**”. It has been defined in ways sometimes ridiculous and yet, so accurate. It is a mother’s maternal instinct on her baby. It is a friend in need. It is romantic, and times even

sexual. Some say they can't breathe without the people they feel this "four letter" feeling for. Some, on the other hand, detest it. Some spend their lives chasing it. Some spend their lives running from it. All these go to show how far love can be defined and how diverse this simple feeling, is. One thing is for sure – love is all around us.

This chapter discusses love from a romantic perspective.

So what is a romantic love, you ask?

If you want to know what being in love feels like, simply ask someone who is newly in love.

*‘Love is not wanting to go anywhere without her. Love is not caring what other people think about the two of you. Love is when you feel depressed and sickly when you're not with her. You feel like your life has no meaning or purpose without her. And that if she wasn't holding your hand you would float away to heaven from where she came. Love is caring for her, physically and emotionally. It's telling her every day, anytime, anywhere, anyhow, for no just reason that you love her. Love is telling her you want to spend the rest of your life with her. Love is wanting to marry her even though you have not been dating that long. That you would do anything and everything for her. It's the feeling that you would give up everything just to see her smile or look into her beautiful eyes or hear her soft, soothing voice. Love is pure happiness. Love is the feeling you get when all you have to do is think of her and it brings a smile to your face and a yearning to your heart. Love is not being able to think about nothing but her. Love is having the sweetest dreams about her and waking up with a smile on your face. Love is an overwhelming feeling of pure bliss when the two of you kiss. Love is wanting to hold her in your arms till the end of time. Love is wishing your time with her never ends, that your lips would be locked together forever, that she'd be in your arms till the end of time, that you could cuddle with her for all of eternity. Love is being helplessly and deeply in*

*love with her and knowing your love for her and your feelings for her will never change/end. Love is the world, the world is love, and she is the world to me.”*

**- Sabes, about his love, Elizabeth**

Some say this is infatuation. I can neither agree nor disagree. I can definitely say, it is a stage of love though. I believe love is a process, that can last a day and if you are lucky, a lifetime – most times somewhere in between. I believe infatuation is a stage of love when you have not really had to face life with and by each other, but it is love all the same.

Now when you are done with this definition of love, go and ask a couple that has been together 20+ years. The definition will be vastly different and yet so similar. I call it:

***The sober definition of love.***

They will tell you that love is not easy (honey, dealing with any human being is not easy – and hell for a lifetime!) They will tell you that you will have to work to make it work, you will have to be patient, and that you will have to be resilient. They will tell you there will be good days and there will be bad days, and that you will have to stick it to the end.

The bible wasn't far off when it defined love;

*‘Love is patient, love is kind.*

*It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.*

*It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking*

*It is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.*

*Love does not delight in evil*

*But rejoices with the truth.*

*It always protects, always trusts*

*Always hopes, always perseveres.*

**- 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8**

Thus, as far I know this is the nearest, if not most accurate, definition of love, including a romantic one. Love is patient, love is kind (in the voice of Mary Lambert, what a voice!)

When you choose to love someone, you choose to love the whole of them, with all the baggage and the mess they come with. You accept them with all their flaws and kinks. You choose to accept their broken relationships, they failed dreams, their happy days and all their pain. If you choose to deal with that for any human being, you will have to be patient, you will have to be kind. It is that, or you have not loved.

I also know that by loving someone, you commit to being their right hand man and making them better – whatever the cost. You commit to supporting their dreams and talents, and correcting them when they are wrong despite the consequences.

Darling, love did not promise it would be flawless. There will be fights, and days you would want to stab them in their sleep. There will be days you would want to walk away and never look back. There will be good days and bad days – and these in a balance.

That is possibly the most ironic thing about this life,

*“For every action, there is an equal and opposing reaction”*

**– Newton’s Third Law**

Darling, nothing in this life comes easy. For every amazing thing you see, there is an equally devastating force opposing it. It may not be made visible to you. You may not see it, but there always is. Someone once said:

*“I would rather cry in a BMW than cry on a bike”.*

I am not certain of this analogy. I can, however, promise you that the tears in a BMW will definitely be related to the value of that BMW and darling, whether it is hunger you are crying from or unending debt and even your billionaire husband leaving you neglected; pain, though being relative, remains pain. What hurts me may not hurt the next person the same way, but the pain we feel is the same regardless.

So when you choose love, there is an opposing force against that love you have which is usually the same person offering that love, the surrounding you are in or even the people around him and you. When you choose to take love from someone, you also commit to giving them love despite the circumstances. You will have to face the people that are possessive over them – his mother, her siblings, his friends, her exes. You will have to love him/her regardless. You will see them at their lowest point, when they are absolutely unsure about life or who they are meant to be. You will see them at their worst when they choose to make some ridiculous and at times heartless decisions and you will have to



stand there and say “Not that way darling”, “This is not who you are”. Love is patient. Love is kind.

And through the best and the worst, the two of you must commit to love.

## **Stages of growth in love**

### ***Stage 1: Naïve and belief in “The One”***

I do not believe in saying that the idea of “the one” is unrealistic or does not exist. I absolutely believe in the one. I am not certain of whether it really only one, but definitely there is that one that when we meet them we sigh, smile and say “aaaaaah”. The one you look at and say a little prayer, like “Yahweh You outdid yourself with this one!”

As a naïve 15 year old and having watched all the fairy-tale in the world, you are almost set up waiting for, or rather looking for prince charming to come and save you. If you are like me, by the end of your teens, you must likely have kissed every frog along the way with your fingers crossed and hoping, in the words of Miley Cyrus, “He could be the one”. And they come, and they go, and come, and go, till you realise “The One’ doesn’t just come that easy. And the saddest part is, we never truly realise or acknowledge how ridiculous our relationships may have been until we are standing outside, at the finish line, looking back into our pasts.

### ***Stage 2: Needy, at times toxic lover***

I remember my first definition of love – long before I even found love itself. I just knew it had to be perfect, beautiful, something

from a fairy-tale - something that would take away all my miseries and all my sorrows. Perhaps, I had watched just one too many fairy tales – I mean which little girl hadn't?

Now there was always something fairy tales had in common – a little girl with a broken childhood/life, and she meets her prince charming – then her previously broken life turns around into a now perfect life. But before this must happen, they must fight (and together, her and her prince charming) for their love against all odds (whatever that may be) and they must overcome to achieve this beautiful love. Fairy tales, you see, make love seem beautiful and yet at the same time define love in the worst way one possibly could. Fairy tales basically programme you to believe:

- One must have had a rough past to find love
- Love, a man, will save you
- True love conquers all
- One must fight against all odds for true love
- Love will solve all your problems

Those were my subconscious expectations of love. Love would solve my broken relationship with my mother. Love would make me accepted by everyone around me. Love could fill the void my best friend had left in my life. Love would make all the bullying I had endured in school go away. Love would heal all my wounds.

Love would...

Love would...

Now I can never really say if I ever did find love or if what I found was love; but what I do know is that, when I thought I had found it, I dumped all my brokenness on it and drowned all the love that could have been, one problem at a time. You cannot blame me, fairy tales said I could. In fact, fairy tales said I should.

### **What is a toxic love**

Writer and blogger Brad Paul in his article “*Toxic Love relationships*” defines toxic love, unhealthy relationship, toxic relationship, and bad relationship; according to Brad Paul, all these kinds of relationships mean the same thing although they have different names. This segment discusses all of them, but only from the point of view of a romantic love relationship.

Brad Paul defines toxic love as a sickness in the hearts of the participants. It is a union of unhealthy and needy individuals. It is a parasite of the human spirit. It uses another person’s weakened spirit to survive. It is an emotional cancer that destroys the healthy parts of a person until there is nothing left except an empty shell—unless its progression is stopped!

A person in a toxic love relationship can fool themselves and their partner into believing that they are protectors, givers, nurturers, or enlighteners. The condition of the relationship is one of uncertainty, anger, neediness, insecurity, and suspicion.

Once you are deeply involved in a toxic love affair, you gradually lose the ability to recognise behaviour that is unhealthy and unacceptable. You eventually lose touch with the concept of a healthy relationship.

In these relationships, each partner's central role is either as a parasite or as a victim. However, these roles can switch periodically if an emotionally charged situation arises like a bitter argument. When this happens, repressed sick elements in an individual can come shooting out like red-hot lava from an angry volcano!

The degree of sick behaviour by either partner can vary. One of them may be sicker than the other. One or both of them may abuse their partner. They may abuse in different ways. Their abuse might be blatant or indiscernible. It might be unintentional or subconscious or both. Whatever the method of delivery, it is equally damaging to the recipient. The sinister aspect of imperceptible abuse is that, it's difficult to identify and explain. This makes it hard to gain support from family and friends.

Any relationship that makes you feel bad is or has the capability of becoming a toxic love relationship. It doesn't necessarily mean that one or both partners have to be psychologically ill for this to occur. Just being with a person who is wrong for you can lead to a toxic love relationship.

This takes me back to sometime in 2013, lying in my tiny dorm-room bed texting my then first boyfriend late into the night as usual. We used to talk about anything and everything – I've learnt for me to get fond of someone they must at the very least have this ability, be able to talk about anything and everything.

We met a year after I had just finished high school. Then, I thought there was something about him that no one else possessed. We hit it off from the very first day we met. We were

friends for a long time, long before we dated. We started dating on 10 November, 2012. I remember this because, well, it's a beautiful date... 10/11/12... get it? 10... 11... 12...

Fast forward a year later and this was the one person I would run to for any and everything. He was my best friend. I was his human. We worked that way. Perhaps, that was everything that was wrong with our love.

I remember that night when he told me how hard he had fought his friends off to stay with me.

“They told me so many terrible things about you. It did not make any sense to me because the Nthanda they told me about was not the Nthanda that I knew” he said.

I cried that night, deeply, painfully, and truly. You know the moments that define us, make us, unravel us; we do not prepare for them. They just happen. And that was one of them. Without knowing he unravelled a whole lot of pain that even I did not know I had.

I was accepted. For once, someone chose me against all odds. Someone chose to fight for me despite what other people said about me. I know today it was not out of his maturity that he did this. It was not out of wisdom, say, “knowing better”. It was simply for the deep bond we had shared as friends, long before anyone could have come in to ruin what we had. It was so heart-breaking realising the extents people will go to discredit other people without ever truly thinking how this may make the person being spoken off feel, but at the same time so beautiful realising he

chose our friendship, and chose to have faith in me, despite what everyone might have said.

And there begun my toxic relationship. He healed all the neglect I had previously experienced in my life, and the thought of losing him, meant going back to that place of not being accepted.

## **Recognising a Toxic Love Relationship**

So how do you know when you're in a toxic love relationship? Brad Paul says that during the early stages of these relationships, it's hard to spot. If either partner has unhealthy tendencies, they usually repress them. As a person becomes more involved, especially if they are at a low point in their life, it progressively becomes more difficult to determine. This is particularly true if one or both partners are getting sicker as a result their involvement in the toxic love affair.

One of the best ways to know if you are in a toxic love relationship is to look at how you feel! Since you've been together do you feel better or worse about yourself and your life? When you spend time together, do you feel uplifted, relaxed, and confident or do you feel depressed, nervous, and unsure? When you're apart, do you feel certain and at peace about your relationship or do you feel confused and anxious about it? If you feel like the second part of these comparative questions more often than not, you may be in a toxic love relationship. This however may not always be easy to spot as most toxic love relationships have you feeling better about some things. You are happy possibly 10% of the time but you

need that 10% so much so that you will endure the 90% bad, to cling on to that good 10.

Another, and perhaps more reliable, method for determining whether you are in a toxic love relationship is to tune in to what your intuition, or gut feelings, are telling you. (Intuition and gut feelings are different names for the same thing.)

Perhaps my experience was not as is stated above. We had a good relationship. It was us, or me, that was sick. I won't speak on his behalf, I will let him tell his own story. We had a good thing, you see. I felt safe, I felt secure. I was at peace, never confused, nor anxious, nor unsure. In fact, it was so good it made such a great catalyst for the toxic relationship I needed. I needed a safe haven, something to save me, accept me, perhaps even swallow me whole. And it did just that. I was never aware of my personal psychological issues, and worse still that I needed to heal from them. I deflected from dealing with any of the issues from my past as long as I had him. I thought if I had him, everything in my world would be perfect.

Even if you grew up in a home with parents who had a sick relationship, you would know better. Certainly, you've known at least one couple that had a relationship that you could use as a healthy relationship model.

If you grew up with parents who fought a lot, there certainly is the inclination to fall into unhealthy relationships, but we have a choice. The best choice we can make is to take 100% responsibility

for our adult relationships. This means not blaming our parents or anyone else for the outcome of our relationship choices.

I have fallen into some of toxic love relationships in my life, and also managed to have some healthy ones as well. Given that I have been in very few relationships (by the strict definition of a relationship), most times, these relationship were both. I am yet to experience a fully healthy relationship, you know – when I am fully healed and capable of having such a relationship myself. I am certain of some things though, that there is absolutely no comparison in terms of joy, fulfilment, and productivity than when you are in a healthy relationship as opposed to a toxic one. It is until you are in an extremely healthy relationship that you understand the meaning of true love. You will find a shift in your consciousness to being more concerned about his/her happiness more than about your own. The more you give without measure, the more you receive.

One of the characteristics of a toxic love relationship is self-centeredness! A toxic love relationship is about you. Whatever your reason may be for getting in a toxic love relationship, it goes without saying that you got into this relationship for what you stand to gain from it – be it social validation, acceptance or whatever else. That is the problem with a toxic love relationship. You are in it to gain, not to give. You give nonetheless, but only to get back something.

One of the most amazing things about being in a bad relationship, which Brad talks about in one of his articles, is how you feel about



them once you break free. Like I said, you can only judge these relationships better when you are at the finish line. It becomes almost impossible for you to figure out what you ever saw in them, or why you ever were with that person. While you are deeply entrenched in the turmoil of the relationship, you fail to see the futility of the situation.

When you are younger and have not fully embarked on a journey of self-discovery yet, it is almost impossible for you to acknowledge being in a toxic relationship, or better yet that you might be the toxic lover in question.

Your intuition, or gut feelings, is the most reliable way for you to decide if you're in a toxic love relationship, but you may not have access to this information right now for two reasons:

- (1) You have not developed the ability to tune in to and trust your intuition, or gut feelings.
- (2) The sickness of your relationship may have progressed to the point where you can no longer distinguish between healthy and unhealthy behaviour.

If you have not developed the ability to tune in to and trust your intuition you can learn! Everybody has this capability. Have you ever had a strong feeling about a particular person or situation that turned out exactly as you had thought? That is your intuition speaking to you.

If the sickness of your relationship has progressed to the point where your mind has turned to mush, try to understand love is

from what it is not. This will take you on a journey of discovering what you will NOT feel, think, share, and experience when you're "truly" in love. The list of what love should not be, is a perfect description of a toxic love relationship.

## **Escaping a Toxic Love Relationship**

Once you have admitted to yourself that you are indeed in a toxic love relationship, the next step is to decide whether you wish to work through it, or end it. I cannot recommend either, but I can assure you that the former is certainly harder than the latter; however, both are still difficult.

When you find yourself in a toxic love relationship, most psychologists recommend that you find a way to separate yourself from the relationship, immediately! This is possibly more practical in a fantasy as we all know love does not just fly out of the door that easily.

If you cannot bear the thought of permanently ending your relationship right now, Brad suggests that you try out the **"30-90 day break"**. Basically, you propose to your partner with conviction that you take 30 to 90 days off under the conditions described below.

Both partners agree to:

- Cut off all contact and communication for any reason for 30 to 90 days.
- Reset the clock if either person violates these conditions for any reason.

- Meet in a neutral location (park, restaurant) at the end of 30 to 90 days.
- Write a letter to each other and present it during the meeting. (Optional)
- Honour the wishes of either partner who wants to end the relationship at the conclusion of the meeting without any argument or repercussions.

Agreeing to meet at the end of a 30 to 90 day period will provide the sense of security that you both might need at this point. Most importantly, it will give you the space and time you need to regain your personal power. It will also give your partner a cooling off period.

There is one caveat to making this 30 to 90 day agreement. There's a good chance that your feelings for one another will change or switch by the time you meet. For example, you may have initiated the separation but later you decide that you want to give the relationship one more try. At the time of your separation, your partner may have begged you to stay together. But when they arrive at the meeting they want to end the relationship permanently. The only thing you need to do is prepare yourself for any outcome and not have any expectations.

If you are not sure whether you should leave your partner, consider these things. In your current state, you have nothing positive to give to this or any other relationship. The same is true of your partner.

The best thing to do for yourself, and your partner, is to break away from the relationship completely or at least in the manner described above. Your goal is to put some time and physical distance between you and the relationship. This will give you the opportunity to regain your emotional equilibrium. Once you're away from the stress and sickness of the relationship for a while, you'll begin to see it for what it truly is: toxic love, perhaps? The only person on earth, who can truly decide and make the effort to change it, if at all, is you! Nobody's opinion matters.

If you feel your relationship may be salvageable, attempt to talk things through with your partner without being confrontational. Lay out all your issues on the table, and start to sort through them one by one. Embark on a journey of personal growth together, and choose to become each other's mirror to show each other when things are working, and when they are not working. I have not gone down this route before as such I may not be the best one to advise, but as an old friend of mine once said "sometimes two broken individuals find healing in each other". As to the practicality of this, I am not eligible to comment but I can sure promise you that the process of self-discovery is so painful, and so tedious, it might ruin any last bit of the relationship you had to save. If, however, you can survive this process as a couple and get to a healthy state for the both of you individually such that you are able to now have a healthy love relationship, kudos to you! I'd say you are close to meant to be!

If you feel that your relationship is not worth any further investment, then I would encourage you to look at this transition

as an opportunity for personal growth! To support your efforts, read as much information as you can on topics related to your needs and goals. There are so many good books that you might consider as regards your growth and self-knowledge.

### ***Stage 3: The Heart-wrenching Heartbreak***

What happens when you avoid ending a toxic love relationship? You get heartbroken. Not the cute heartbreak you have heard about. Not the “I will miss you! How could you disappoint me?” heartbreak.

This is the Adele “*All I ask*”, Emeli Sande “*Suitcase*”, Sam Smith “*Stay with Me*” type of heart wrenching heartbreak.

I remember vividly when and how I went through mine. It was 3am on an August night. August is not cold where I am from, but on that particular night, August was below freezing point to me. I was sitting outside the hall all by myself, with a guard standing next to me not knowing what to do with a heartbroken woman crying her soul out.

I banged the door behind me and walked away from him and everything I had known for the previous two years. In my heart, even when I did not want to admit it to myself, I knew with every fibre of my being, we were done. It did not need someone else to tell me that. I walked away knowing this would not have been reason - that this fight was not the reason- that he really just needed an excuse. We hadn't been us for a while. This hadn't been love for a long time. We both knew it, but perhaps refused to face

it so much so that it ruined a perfectly good friendship that started all this.

“It hasn’t worked out for a while now. I can’t keep hurting you.” He said.

We had done this so many times before this moment, but this time I knew this was it. It was the look on his face, one I had never seen before. He looked so cold, with absolutely no regard for my feelings anymore. In that exact moment, there wasn’t an inch of care for me.

In that moment, he was taking care of himself. Looking back, now, way beyond the finish line, I wish I could tell him how proud I am of him. I wish I could tell him how happy I am for him, that he found the courage and the guts to break off the ties from something that had been eating away at his soul for a while. I never had the courage to do that. I was too cowardly. I did not trust myself to hold together if I lost him, and boy, was I right not to? I came crashing down from that moment.

Every day beyond that day was pure hell for me. Everything that I thought I had was gone. For the first time, I did not have someone. It was me, against me. I did not like who I was stuck with – me. I blamed him a lot for it, “how do you leave someone you promised forever to?” “How do you give up on someone you love?”

Truth be told, now I know you cannot promise forever to anyone. Today, I know things change, people change, and moments do not last forever. As hard as that may be to contextualise, that is reality.

Fairy-tale just don't exist darling. Today, I understand you can give up on someone/something you love if it is eating away at you. You deserve peace of mind darling, whatever the cost.

It was time I realised that I did not like the fact that I was stuck with me. I did not like me.

#### ***Stage 4: Rebound – The Search for Another***

When I went through my first heartbreak, I still wanted to believe in love. Obviously, he was the reason it did not work out, duh! I started reading all that Rupi Kaur about broken hearts and selfish boys. Now, I tend to question; maybe they had a right to be selfish? After all, what really did they owe me? A promise of forever? Through thick and thin long before we even walked down the aisle? Wasn't this supposed to be the thin so at least we can have some good to look back to and say "We used to be happy"?

But that is me now. Immediately after my heartbreak I did not believe I could in any way have been at fault. I was a good woman! Okay arguably, but I did love him with everything I had to offer. Perhaps, that was the problems. Yikes! This love thing. What is too little? What is too much? Who is responsible for the rationing?

I could cook, I could wash, multitalented, I believed I was beautiful (whatever that meant to me back then) and darling I was the whole package. I was wife material as they used to call it on twitter back then! How dare he!

The very next day after we broke up, I was already getting close to another guy (I know). I needed a way out of my pain. And hell if

he didn't see my worth, another would. It was him, and the next guy, and the next guy... and the next. 12 guys down the line, maybe I did have to pump the breaks and realise it was not their job to acknowledge my worth. But it took a lot more than just 12 guys and a realisation.

### ***Stage 5: Frustration – “They are all the same”***

My first love having failed, I was still searching for someone, something to fill that void I had. Someone to take on my burden. Someone to, I suppose, to take me as I am, and make me whole. Someone to make me happy, someone to be my happiness.

So I tried, and tried, and tried again. I met him, and him, and then him. I tried to convince myself there was just something wrong with them... all of them. That I was the perfect one. I mean think about it, I was fairly not bad looking, I was relatively in shape, I knew my way around the kitchen, I was the definition of 'Loving'... when you are that toxic, you just have to be! Any man would be lucky to have me! So you see, it was them, not me!

### ***Stage 6: Pick One and Settle***

As the saying goes,

“If all the men are the same, then pick one already”

If you tell your friends you cannot find the right man, their most likely response will be:

“there is no right man”

Or something more amusing I have heard:



“There is no Mr. Right. You go to the left, grab that man and drag him to the right”.

We say these statements jokingly I suppose. We do not really take a moment to decipher what we mean. We do not care for the young ones that are so easily influenced and may catch on to the words we say.

I remember lying on his bed crying eyes out. This was my second boyfriend. There was so much pain inside me, pain that had to go.

“We can end this now. I don’t want you to remember me as having hurt you.” He said.

If I have one regret, it is that I did not pack up every little sense of dignity I had left and went my way forever. I needed this lesson. So maybe that lesson was so worth it – it is no longer a regret.

Then I recall myself standing outside the hospital in the parking lot. I was completely in tears and in absolute denial that this was even happening to me. I did not just get on a bus all the way from Mangochi to Blantyre, to have the man I loved say he could not see me.

I bet you are wondering why. In all honesty, to this day, I am too. He said “You know I do not like surprises. If it was me you were coming to see you would have told me in advance. So go ahead and see whoever it is that you came to see in Blantyre”.

I ran into him as I was heading out about to leave. He told me to wait for him in his car and left me there alone. I contemplated

walking out and away forever so many times in that car, and yet a not-so-sincere apology and a hug later, I still did not leave.

Backing it up all the way to the beginning – an Instagram DM ago (man I had all the red flags and I still chose to be blind!), a bit of texting, a perfect first date and a few more dates, I did not imagine this would be the way we would end. I should have seen it coming though. I just didn't.

He sent me a direct message (yes it goes down in the DM!) on Instagram about some project about Women's Empowerment he was working on. He got my number and we started talking about it. He paid so much attention to every little detail about me – or perhaps, even already knew most of them. I must have either been really desperate for love, or it was the mistreatment I was getting from my current situation that made me jump right into this relationship - my second relationship. I have such an amazing taste in men. Amazing – haa.

And everyone asks “what did you ever see in him???” Oh I don't know. It must have been the attention he gave me, possibly his well chiselled physique, maybe the nice cars, could have been his excellent school grades, maybe the master's degree, maybe the beautiful house, heck the money, perhaps, even how he treated me. I really don't know. I do know, however, that he came in a mask of my dream man (at least at the time). You know girls have this image of what Mr. Right will be; that we will know when he shows up. Oh yes, I knew! If anything, I am glad he came and went. As my sister and I would say, “Jesu!”

I remember the first time he asked me out on a date. There was a fundraising Dinner in his city (very expensive one for my taste at the time) and he asked me to go with him. He offered to organise my transport there and book me into a nice Hotel for my stay after the dinner. Given we had not met yet, in as much as I trusted his intentions not to be malicious, I still politely said no. It was the fact that I was kind of seeing someone (and this may be an overstatement), and that I just could not let someone spend that much money on me simply for a first date. Heck my situation then had not even taken me for a sandwich yet. I told him I was going to school in a few days, and that I would be close so we could perhaps meet then.

I woke up one Saturday morning and my friend Josephine came bulging into my room and asked me how my leg was doing. I could not fully capture the events from the previous night – or better yet how I had gotten to bed. She said I had come to her, told her I was hurt and that we needed to go. She took me to my room and wrapped my leg up and put me in my bed.

I moved my right leg and told her it was a minor scratch, I would be fine. She then removed my covers and there was a sight that shocked even me. My leg was wrapped in tissue paper with blood and puss everywhere sticking to my bed linen. Up to this day, I still wonder what happened to me – how bad a fall it must have been for me to acquire a wound so big. The skin on my whole left knee was pretty much scrapped off.

I was seeing some boy then. It was not close to a good relationship. He had called me the previous day and said I should meet him out that night so we could work things out. I got together with my girlfriends and we went out for a night of fun. When I had gotten hurt, my friends claim I was with him.

I picked my phone up and called him to ask him what had happened to me. He told me that he barely saw me the previous night. This did make sense to me, as I did recall him doing his best to ignore me. I sent him a picture of the wound and asked him if he could escort me to the hospital. He apologised and said that he could not. He had to go meet his mother. I curled up in my bed and tried to go back to sleep. I was not in the least bit surprised. Disappointments from him were nothing new. Luckily, I wasn't really in that much pain. I suppose the adrenaline was still high. My body was still in shock.

My phone went off and Mr. Right's name popped up. He asked me if I was still up for brunch as we had agreed the previous night. I did not remember agreeing to this. He insisted we had been talking the previous night and I had agreed to having brunch with him this morning. I went back to my chats and found that we had indeed been chatting the previous night and I had jokingly agreed to him taking me out for my recovery in the morning.

I went back to the phone and told him I could not make it, as I was hurt. In the back of my mind I was hoping his doctor self could come and save me. With the disappointments from the men in my life then, I truly did not think he would really do it.

About 30 minutes later, he called asking me to come outside to the carpark to meet him. I could barely walk but managed to drag myself to get ready and pushed myself all the way to his car. He got out of the car as soon as he saw me approaching and watched me carefully as he smiled... half laughing, while I limped my way towards him. It should have been his car that should have caught my attention first, but in that moment I was focused on this man, one that knew how to show up and be there for someone. He was averagely taller than me, well built, decent face. I loved his outfit, absolutely. He was wearing some arguably tight grey pants and a clean white t-shirt that hugged his muscles well. He paired that fit with some beautiful white sneakers. When he hugged me, he smelled lovely. The “Mr. Right List” in my head was just checking itself in the back of my mind as the day progressed. It was a slippery slope!

He held me by the hand and helped me into the car and then closed the door behind me. That was when I took time to notice his car. Who was this man? He got into the car and we drove off. Right then and there, as it had played so many more times in my head, cued Hannah Montana’s “He could be the oone”!

As we left town I asked him where it was that we would be grabbing brunch. He told me he had a surprise for me and I was too tired, and too sick, to care. As soon as we got in his city which was barely 30 minutes away, we went straight to the pharmacy and bought all that would be needed to clean my wound. We then went and grabbed brunch – with the time, lunch, as was agreed. That steak, I still remember vividly, was all I needed that day. A few

chats and laughs later, we went to his house and he knelt down and dressed my wound so carefully. It was the sweetest thing anyone had done for me in a while. For a good part of our relationship I had that wound as it was healing. I suppose the healing of that wound was the end for me and him... and even better my own healing from my own past.

We started off for my city, but made a quick stop to meet his pals. He introduced me to everyone and half of them already knew about me. I was no stranger to this man. He knew about me. It should have been a red flag then, but after experiencing my good share of college boys, it honestly did not take much to convince me.

He came again, the next day, to check on me and see how my wound was doing. It was always good chats. We were always laughing. As he was dropping me off he asked me if he could take me on a real date on Tuesday as Wednesday was a holiday. Could have fooled me, I thought the past two had been dates already.

We went out on the first date, had a splendid time, and then another date, and another date. It was always a peaceful and lovely time. He told me about some of his flaws. His intentions were clear. He really wanted to be with me. He did not set out to hurt me. I still believe to this day that he was very honest with me. The only problem was that he could only be as honest with me, as honest as he had been with himself. It took me a few months to realise that he had not met himself deeply. He chose not to.

Knowing as much as I do now, I cannot say that I blame his choice.

In no time he started introducing me to his friends as his girlfriend. After a few hesitations, I accepted it. He was nice, you know. I had told myself that he would have his flaws but I would stick with him because I had picked my demon and I would settle. After all, they were the same... right?

When you decide to date someone, you choose to take on their life and become a part of it. It is no longer about fancy dates, or some sweet light-hearted banter. Dating is the real stuff! You start getting to know the person – who they are, where they are coming from, what made them. You get to know their daddy issues, their mummy issues, what they went through to get here. You get to know the real person. Like I said, that's the stuff!

So now you learn they can be stubborn for no apparent reason at all other than that they like to get their way. You start to see how they treat strangers (and you can't always apologise for them). You get to experience their drinking habits, their hygiene, how much money they make, and better yet spend, on what and why.

If you are “woke” (I like this word), you begin to assess why they do every single they do. You begin to understand, you start to sympathise.

So yes, I have never doubted his love for me. I remember the day he told me to walk away from him even after having told me he loved me – he has spent most of his life alone, how could he know how to be with another? They might have isolated him, he may

have isolated himself. I understand when he completely disregarded my emotions and crushed my very soul – how can he know how to take care of another when no one was there to take care of him? I understand why he cheated on me, and denied it like a sociopath – as much life as he had endured, it would take a lot to not let that turn you into a sociopath. I had to conclude it was that, or I will never get closure to the rumours and circumstances that never got any real explanations. I know he used her, and her and her... maybe even me to fill those voids he knew deep down they could not heal, voids even I... holding all his love, could not heal. Voids I, none of us created. Voids he needed to take a walk back into his past, to heal from. When you never learnt to heal, how could you be whole? I acknowledge he is broken, and I am sorry I was so gullible and so desperate such that I thought I could save him, to save me.

Again, long after the finish line, I am inclined to say he was no unique being. The same issues I saw in him, I have seen in myself and a lot more around me. We are all dealing with things, unique as they may be, in different ways. The issue comes where we involve other souls in that process.

There were a few things I learnt from my second and last relationship. Firstly, no one is inherently bad. We are made by what happens to us. Some people have been through more than others, and the art of healing is way too excruciating; for some they would rather proceed living broken lives and making bad decisions with a complete disregard for the people they run over



and through, in the process. Can you blame them? Everyone else disregarded them.

Second was that you cannot singlehandedly save someone. I recall the days his sister would tell me to fast with her to save her brother. I loved him enough. On God, I would have. However, I told her “darling, only **he** can decide to change. Only **he** can decide to heal and start anew. Till **he** decides, **he** will remain this.”

I saw her heart breaking, as was mine. A man we both loved and yet even together, could not save. Only he could do that. Better yet, we had to accept that it may not have been that he did not acknowledge that he needed to heal, but that even he did not know where to begin healing from his own pain.

*You cannot save someone.*

As for the statement that says “They are all the same”, maybe, but it depends on where it is that you are standing. They were all born good. They all have had different experiences in life. They might have lost that good somewhere on the way, even at times not realising it. Then they dug their own hole deeper and deeper until they did not know how to get out.

I know now that you deserve someone that is on a pursuit of good. A pursuit to be good – good for him/her, good for you and good for everyone around him. As much as you are on a journey of healing, so should the person you love be. He/she should at the very least be able to acknowledge he/she is flawed, and be willing to be better, whatever the pain, knowing you will be right there

holding him/her when he/she crashes. After all, isn't that the essence of having someone in this life?

Again, he/she is not to blame for your pain. Yes, he/she had a part to play, but these are the choices you made. It is all about you. As for the idea of Miss/Mr. Right, she/he might be out there; just make sure those qualities are not superficial. A human being remains what he/she is at the core. Look for good people, but do not try to save them from what life has done to them. Let them know you acknowledge their truth. Let them know you will be right there when it all comes crashing down. Let them know you will hold their hand. But do not try to save them. Only they can do that.

### ***Stage 6 – Twist! Face Yourself***

It took me four years and a few broken hearts later (my own and other people's) after my first love to fully admit to myself that I was, in fact, a toxic lover. Even when I got into my second relationship, which was indeed toxic – I had not yet fully accepted my own toxic traits.

Now I don't know about you, but I don't handle the news of my not being less than perfect very well. I must be perfect, I must be good at everything, I cannot be bad, I cannot fail, and I cannot be the problem in the equation.

Having 'auditioned' about 10+ eligible bachelors and all of them having failed miserably to step up to the plate and "make me happy," and realising that I was breaking innocent hearts continuously and repeatedly, I had to take a step back and re-

evaluate what was going on in my love life. I had met at least 15 good looking successful and ambitious gentlemen that could possibly have been great lovers yet something was always missing. I was still not happy. They were still not good enough. Or were they? Perhaps, only one thing was the problem, and that one thing was me. I was the toxic lover!

That was the beginning of a change for me. For the first time, everything I had tried to be defensive about in my life now came ringing in echoes in my ears and all of a sudden it was no longer personal attacks on my character and my personality. It was simply the truth.

“You are needy”

“You are too emotional”

“You are too demanding”

“No one can live up to that”

And you know what, they were right. Yes I admit it, they were right - each and every one of them. Despite them having their faults, I had mine too. No one should have had to live up to all that, and if my ego and pride never let me say it then, allow me to say it now; I am sorry – to anyone that I ever made feel like they were not good enough simply because I was not good enough.

## Chapter 9. SEX

Now I know that when the topic of sex comes up, especially in a community like the one I grew up in, everyone wants to shudder and face the other way.

Once someone brings the topic up we all act like they have just committed one of the worst crimes we know of. The usual “Iiiiih!”s, hums and face twitches. We joke about it, sure. Sex makes for possibly the best jokes in the world. We laugh and we jeer but we do not want to talk about the reality of sex itself. Let’s face it, nobody really wants to talk about sex unless it is with their peers or perhaps their lovers. It is an absolutely uncomfortable topic, but a very important one and one we should begin to converse more openly among ourselves especially as teenagers.

Whether we like it or not, sex is a part of our reality and the very reason for the existence of each and every one of us here – yes even you. So I am not going to shrug and look the other way. I will talk to you about sex. So let us define it.

### **Definition**

#### **Sex**

*Sexual activity, including specifically sexual intercourse.*

By this time now that you are a teenager, I hope you have had “The Talk” about sex with your parents or guardians. If you have not, this is the point you place the book down and go up to them to ask them to have that talk with you.

I cannot remember the first definition I had of sex. I remember it being called “*zopusa*” in Chichewa, my mother tongue – “*something silly/stupid*”. It was a taboo topic, something you do not just talk about. You did not just bring up the topic of sex anyhow unless you were yearning a beating or scolding of some sort from the person that was at the moment responsible for you. It was not a topic of discussion, at least not with or among children. Lest your mother hears you were “talking about *zopusa*” and she would drag you by your ear all the way to your house and give you a rather nice beating.

I remember when I was in Primary 5/6 and most of the girls had started developing breasts. Boys would laugh at the girls and they would do their best to hide them. Other boys started developing deeper voices and they would speak lower to divert attention away from themselves. Then, it was considered “growing up” (ha)! Becoming a man or a woman. None of us wanted to do that. We were meant to be forever young, so indeed we did laugh and ridicule our peers. Children!

Then Primary seven – the famous (or infamous) topic: “Growing Up and Changing” came around. I recall the cheers and screams when the teacher brought up the topic. Now, obviously, by this time most of us had taken a sneak peek at the text books to see what this topic really was about. Up until this moment it was really all just a blur. Sex – it sure was something. Something so important it was kept hidden from us for a good number of years.

## **The anatomy of Sex**

By the time you are a teenager, I expect that:

1. You have learnt about “growing and changing” in school – *sexual reproductive health*,

And

2. You have had ***the talk*** about sex with your parents;

So it is not within my interest to go into the biological details of sex. That is your teacher’s job. I would not really want to go into the consequences of sex either as I would like to believe that your parents, and possibly other responsible people have taught you for a long time about the same.

Discussing this topic reminds me that we have to talk about our Christian values on the same and how this affects our decisions on sex. Sex values normally hinge a lot on spirituality. Truly, the process of making life is quite spiritual.

I most times refuse to share my Christian views as I refuse to use my views, to waver yours. Everyone should be allowed to believe what they believe in, and I hope in the end your choice was the best one. So I will do my best to disassociate Christian arguments with this topic, but that whatever is discussed here will help you make better decisions, whatever you believe in or value.

I will thus attempt to discuss this as objectively as I can manage to. A little ironic considering I want to try and tackle the psychological aspect of sex.

### **i. Sexual Orientation**

Where I grew up, this is not really a topic that is openly discussed in my community. Where I am from, you only have one option and that is to be straight. This most times is connected to Christian values which make most people shun away from even discussing the topic. Some people in my country get arrested, beaten and sometimes stoned for the same.

I hope by the end of your teens, you can become wholesome human beings – people that are able to develop their own opinions, views and values in this life. I hope you are able to critically and objectively assess everything that goes on around you. I hope you can also let your own views not be wavered by the world, while making sure you are giving other people a right to the same freedom you want for yourself.

Briefly, sexual intercourse happens between two lovers. I use the word lovers because sex can happen between a man and a woman, or two people of the same sex.

According to Wikipedia, sexual orientation is an enduring pattern of romantic or sexual attraction (or a combination of these) to persons of the opposite sex or gender, the same sex or gender, to both sexes, or to more than one gender. These attractions are generally subsumed under heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality, while asexuality (the lack of sexual attraction to others) is sometimes identified as the fourth category.

As a teenager I would expect that you have heard of some people being gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, bi-curious, pan-sexual and sometimes transgender. This may have been from your friends, sometimes

from family, from television or people all around you. If you have not, there is one more thing to add to your “by the end of your teens” research list. Sexual orientation is something you should learn about – be it from other people or your own personal research. You must also understand it and respect it.

I must clarify that whether you identify yourself as straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer or questioning; you have the right to decide what sex means to you. You are allowed to decide for yourself what this means to your personal sex life. This knowledge also helps in the way you associate with people with different views, values and orientations from you. It also helps you choose who you may and may not associate with. You have no right to infringe other people’s rights to do the same.

Sex is a very natural and healthy part of life. Most teenagers find it hard to talk about the topic and this is very normal and understandable. For a topic that has been hidden away from you for 10+/- years, you cannot expect it to just suddenly come up and become an open topic of discussion. Even adults still tread lightly around it. As teenagers, you are advised to abstain from sex, as I would do the same now; I would advise you to abstain if you can, for some very objective reasons that we will discuss as we go.

Choosing to not indulge in sexual activities does not mean we must not know about or discuss it. By the end of your teens, make it a point for yourself to fully research about sex and understand it. Knowledge is power and even if you choose to not indulge in sexual activities, you will still be well equipped with much



knowledge about an important natural phenomenon for all reproductive beings. It is in fact this same knowledge that helps us make very informed decisions and stick to them. When we thoroughly understand what it is that we are doing and why it is that we are doing it, it is easier to keep it going.

You would love to know what sex really is, why people have sex, how people have sex, the pros and cons of having sex. Depending on what age you are, some of your peers may already be indulging in sexual activities. It is important for you to know everything you can about sex before you even attempt to get involved with someone.

## **ii. Sex, love, and insecurities**

I personally believe sex was designed by God for lovers (here come some of my opinions again). Christians believe sex was designed for two married people. To me, it is a form of communication between two people that deeply love each other and would love to get physically intimate. We can leave the subjective discussion of what is wrong or right for other discussion forums.

Sex is a very emotional experience. It requires opening up oneself to someone both physically and emotionally. You will most likely get attached to someone before/after having had such an intimate connection with them and as such you must be cautious who you entertain in your space.

Ultimately, we have thought “Someone should love me. Someone will love me”. Most of us in fact associate sex with love, others

with power, and others with acceptance. How we define sex and what it means to us is entirely subjective; but we can agree on one thing – that sex mixed with some things leads into disaster.

Take for example a young girl that has been rejected and ridiculed all her life. Picture someone who has a lot of deep insecurities and thinks possibly being beautiful could solve all her rejection problems. This girl is so weak and gullible to the point that the first person (man) to tell her she is beautiful and make her feel even slightly accepted could get his way with her. If it is sex he wants with her, she will easily give her body away for the simple feeling of finally being loved and accepted. Now whether the love from this man is true or not, the situation does not begin to be healthy. If the love is true, the little girl will divert her attention from truly facing her past of rejection and healing from it, and start dwelling on the acceptance she has found in this new found love of hers. If the man's intentions were purely sex, he will have his way with her and leave her more broken than she was before because once again, she is rejected and unloved. If this encounter proceeds to a long-term relationship, then begins a toxic love relationship because she still has some psychological issues she is yet to deal with.

Now, a second example, take a young man that has never felt in with the crowd or particularly popular. He has grown up and done well for himself. For the first time, people want to be associated with him (for his success and his money). He may be oblivious to this fact, or may be very well aware of it but choose to be in denial – to lie to himself that it is not so ; that it is not the money or the

success the people around him love. He will simply say to himself “Finally people like me”. Now he will see a few of his mates wanting to drink with him, and some fast girls wanting their way with him. A few drinks later his peers may dare him to pursue a certain ‘hot’ girl in the club. To keep their validation, he will go on to pursue the young lady. She may be interested, she may not. If she is, he will go on to possibly have his way with her, and possibly many women after that. He may even possibly fall in love with one or more of them. However, as long as he still has not dealt with his past rejection and insecurities, he will continue to dig deeper and deeper for that healing in temporary validation and in a place where the validation simply is not there. He will continue having unhealthy toxic situations with most times amazing people.

There are so many things that breed insecurities in us. So many issues that each of us has been through and we require to heal from. We also choose to heal from them in multiple different ways – or at least denigrate. We do drugs, drink alcohol and do some rather strange and questionable things. Sex happens to be one of the popular reasons. Some men think they will find wholesomeness in sleeping with a lot of women. Some women think they will have power from sleeping with a lot of men. Other men and women simply want love and acceptance and will sleep with their counterparts in search for this. Some women simply want a rich man – an easy way out of life and lately, some men too!

One thing is true, all these people need is healing – healing from all their issues. They search for it in sex, among other things; but sooner or later they find that healing is simply not there.

By the end of your teens I want you to make sure you are not one of these people. The choice to have sex is entirely up to you. My advice is that, you should be fully knowledgeable and informed about it before you make the choice to indulge in sexual activities. Be very clear with yourself about your values and principles, and what you are not willing to compromise on.

### **iii. Values and sex**

Speaking of personal values and principles – these are major the factors to consider when you are deciding when and why you will have sex. We have some values instilled in us by our parents, family and friends. We also have some values and principles we have developed on our own based on our own personal journeys and encounters with society. It may be influenced by your Christianity, how you have been treated in the past, and most times the experience of being raped in your past. A lot of factors come to play when you decide whether to indulge in sex or not.

### **iv. Virginity**

This, in my own words, basically means someone who has not had sex before. It is normally used with reference to girls – but is not a term specific to gender. If you have never had sex before, be it a girl or a boy, you are a virgin.

My opinion is that, sex is a precious beautiful experience that you do not just have it with anyone and for the wrong reasons. There is a reason most people advise us to wait for marriage because marriage represents what sex was made for – true love. By the end of your teens, I will ask you to reserve your first sexual experience

for someone you are absolutely in love with. Whether that person will be a boyfriend or husband again is up to you and your personal values. Just make sure that you only have sex or your first sexual experience for at least love. DO not have sex to feed an insecurity, to fix your financial situation, because all your friends are doing it or because it seems cool. Do not do it to please a boy/girl you like. Save it for the one that you love, and loves you. There is entirely no need to rush and if you must wait until marriage for that love to find you, do that. If you find that love sooner, search deep within yourself on whether you want to start having sex or if you want to wait.

#### v. **Celibacy**

If you choose to become sexually active before you get married, there will be times you might consider going celibate for different reasons at different points in your life. You might go celibate because:

- a. You want to revert to your pure Christian values
- b. You are single
- c. Your personal values have changed
- d. Self-preservation
- e. You were raped
- f. You are scarred by some past experiences; and many more

I have had friends that went celibate because they decided they did not want to give their bodies away to anyone that did not value them enough to marry them. Others were celibate because they had been raped in the past. Others were celibate because they

realised that sex did not give them the validation and love they required. Some went celibate because it simply was not what everyone hyped it up to be – they just did not enjoy it. Whatever your reason you have to go celibate, Celibacy remains a very personal journey and you may have every right to go through that journey.

I believe there are a number of questions everyone asks themselves (subconsciously or consciously) before they decide to really go celibate.

The first is the most fundamental:

“Why did I have sex in the first place?”

This may seem like a simple question but is quite challenging when you try to answer it. To break this question down, you devour more questions about sex that help you understand it better;

- a. Was it for you? Did you do it to please yourself?
- b. Was it for your partner? Did you do it to please your partner?
- c. Do you like sex at all?
- d. Did you feel pressured by a past lover to have sex?
- e. Was it to impress friends?
- f. Did you feel pressured by someone else to do it?
- g. Was it out of love?
- h. Was it just for fun or an adventure?
- i. Did you truly believe you were ‘just having fun’?
- j. Was sex, all that you always hoped it would be?

These questions and more may help you realise what you really think of sex especially when it comes to you. The answers may come in yeses and nos, and even sometimes explanations in your head. Each yes and each no is also rewarded with a subconscious reason. Pay attention to these details.

Secondly, we ask ourselves what our true values are, as regards sex.

- a. What is sex to you?
- b. Should sex only be reserved for marriage?
- c. Should sex only be between lovers?
- d. Is sex with friends okay?
- e. Is sex with strangers/acquaintances okay?
- f. How highly do you hold your religious values regarding sex?

These questions will help you understand what your values regarding sex are and where they originate from. They will also help you in making decisions about your sex life and help you avoid making some mistakes I have watched many people make.

#### **vi. STIs, HIV**

By now, I hope you know of the term “safe sex”. I am sure at least once in your life you have heard of a “condomise” campaign.

Sexually transmitted infections are real, HIV being the most dangerous and deadliest of them all. Most of the STIs are viral and thus being incurable. They can affect you for life and at times lead to death. Some will affect your reproductive health when you are ready to have children, and thus, we advise you to abstain from sex

until you are mature enough to make good decisions, or to always have protected sex. Make it a point to research thoroughly about all the possible sexually transmitted diseases. You should also research on how to be safe and prevent contracting them.

Never have unprotected sex with someone you have not gotten tested for STIs together with. It is very easy to get carried away in the moment as hormones are raging in your body – but please make sure you have your head always screwed on right. The consequences are lifetime, and a simple moment is really not worth it.

Briefly, make sure you get tested before ever having any sexual encounter. Make sure you also get tested with your partner before being involved sexually. If you have multiple partners (which I sincerely hope you do not by the end of your teens), make sure you get tested with each and every one of them and still insist to use protection. Do not trust anyone, even if you love them. You do not go with them where they go, and your teens are way too early to trust someone usually as young and as careless as you are.

## **vii. Pregnancy**

Speaking of consequences of sex, one of the major ones and longest-lasting is pregnancy. A baby! Kids are beautiful. To this point, I have told you everything I possibly can about sex while giving you the freedom to make your own decisions regarding sex, but I will have to put my foot down about pregnancy. By the end of your teens, **DO NOT** get pregnant and **DO NOT** get someone pregnant. **DO NOT** have kids! You are still a kid and kids should



not have kids. You are too broke and not fully self-aware to be able to raise another human being.

When I was a teenager, I had this temptation to have my boyfriend's baby simply to have some security and keep him around for life. I have seen the same desperation in a lot of my peers and hence feeling the need to highlight this example. It was desperation, and I will call it as it was. We broke up possibly a year later and I am grateful to God we do not have a lifetime commitment to each other. If someone loves you, they will love you and stay with you no matter what. A baby will not make any man stay. Ask the young single parents around you. Let love be love, and let love be pure, not an obligation. You are way too young. You have a whole life ahead of you and it is way too soon to be thinking of committing to someone for life, especially out of obligation.

Make enough research about ways to prevent pregnancy. The best way to make sure you do not get pregnant is to abstain from sex. When you make the choice to still have sex despite knowing everything you are getting yourself into, also make the choice to research fully about ways to protect yourself from life-long consequences of having sex – pregnancy being one of them.

### **viii. Abortion**

I once had a heated argument about abortion with my mother. I was chosen as one of the panellists to commemorate a talk with student doctors being trained as future abortion service providers on World Safe Abortion day. These were college students at The

College of Medicine under the University of Malawi – most of them were teenagers much like you. Evidently, I had anticipated my mother’s reaction to this news.

My mother is very pro-life. Since I was a teenager, she has always told my sister and I “If either of you ever do get pregnant, please I do not wish to hear that you took a life. Bring the baby home, even if it means that I have to raise him/her.” I choose to identify my mother as “Correctly Pro Life”. I love how she treasures life, and will really fight for it at all costs. Most of the pro-life people I have seen are simply anti-death or anti-murder. They do not do much to fight for life in itself.

I have always loved that about my mother, how we could openly discuss some of the most awkward topics in such a casual manner. I recall a conversation with my sister discussing what would happen if one of us did get pregnant. We imagined our parents’ reactions. My mother would be the most supportive person in the world. My father on the other hand could not be less disappointed in us. We are daddy’s girls, my sister and I and he expects more from us. You cannot blame him, he has given his everything to us. The idea of my father’s disappointment was surely enough to make my sister and I consider abortion if we did get pregnant. However, our father also took it upon himself to enforce open dialogue with our mother, and supported how we talked about these things even if he could not be a part of that conversation. Even if it came down to it, my sister and I both acknowledged how strong a support system we had - including each other.

I acknowledge the biggest decision for any teenager that has gotten pregnant is whether to keep it or not. This decision can be made; be it alone, or with those closest to you.

I remember being a young 15 year old. I remember what my friend's getting pregnant meant back then. I remember the discrimination and ridicule they got. I recall how even I sometimes (subconsciously) judged them and the choices they had made. I can only imagine the fear they had.

I remember girls being expelled from school for getting pregnant. I particularly recall one occasion the whole school followed and laughed at some girl on her way out of the school because she had gotten pregnant. I never thought of it that way then, but I can only imagine now how alone she must have felt then.

I remember some girls being chased out and away by their parents for having disgraced them. I remember a lot, most of which I can and may never be able to relate to.

That was where the argument with my mother begun;

Initially I had thought “well, to have had gone through all that, facing the future and what the statistics say, surely every girl should be allowed to not want to be pregnant anymore.”

I never fully contextualised what that meant then. We are only human, and we do try to find the quickest way out of our problems. We do not really fully process what we say until we have to live with what we have done - living in the now, as they put it.

I still remember the heated arguments I have had with my mother on this topic. I have learnt much from her line of thought, and she has certainly made me see things in a way I never would have.

“I believe every life is sanctified hence there should be no safe way to get done with life. You will only appreciate my words when you have your own child and look into their eyes and think of someone encouraging you to have taken their life or more still the day you will share with someone the pain of failing to have a child.”

I know my mother still holds my first view towards pregnancy and abortion. I am no longer a confused teenager. I have learnt much about problem solving.

I say that I am pro-life, but pro-choice before I am pro-life. I believe every woman – let alone girl, should have a right to choose whether or not she wishes to be a mother, but that the options should be more than whether you have the baby or abort it. Understand that the choice of not be a mother begins at the moment you have sex – and even better, unprotected sex.

I understand why some young girls may feel the need to opt out of motherhood at an early age, and I think there ought to be more options to not being a mother like giving up the baby for adoption, giving the baby to an orphanage home and many more. Where I am from, these options do not exist. I also believe there should be more education to both girls and boys on sex and pregnancy itself.

I am not for abortion, and in no way will ever enforce. I believe life is holy and sanctified and should be protected, but in the right way. Where I am from, abortion is illegal. I believe that we placed

the law as a solution to having the girls that want to terminate their pregnancies keep them. I am blessed to have an understanding mother, I acknowledge my privilege. Even if I got pregnant today I could not have the same fears most girls have. We have openly talked about sex, my mother and I. Most girls haven't had that privilege. I know that if I had been at risk and gotten pregnant as a teenager, my mother would have welcomed me into her home. I know she would have helped me out on any need I might have had.

Some girls are thrown out. Others scared deeply. Some even throw the babies away and others abuse them. Keeping the pregnancy does not change it from being unwanted. It only results in disregarded, and even more damaged children.

I am not for terminating life but I believe we should do more than just slate laws to not have girls not rush to terminate the pregnancy.

I believe the first step we can take to end abortion is making sure those girls that do not wish to be mothers do not have unprotected sex in the first place. This cannot be achieved by scaring young girls and boys about sex. It can only be achieved through open dialogue and making information and the necessary services available to these teenagers. By the end of your teens, you should fully understand all the measures you can take to make sure you do not get pregnant – abstinence being the most efficient of them all. I deeply believe that if we can fully mentor young people

on this topic, the cases of unwanted pregnancies could be tremendously reduced.

Perhaps, some girls may not be as lucky to have access to all this information. It is upon us to make sure the girls that have made this mistake and have gotten pregnant have our support.

I know of some friends that have health complications as a result of unsuccessful unsafe abortions attempted by their mothers when they were younger. Some even end up sick for most of their lives as a result.

Some mothers leave their children at home with the family or a nanny and go back to school. There is a lot that can happen to a child when his/her mother is not around for them at a tender age.

A lot has to be done for the kids and the young mothers. As a young pregnant woman, she should be mentored, supported heavily, for she is young. Abortion should be the last option, however (I do not advocate for this), where it is done, it should at least be safe.

The problem is we have slated a law and think we have solved the problem. Having a law that says “abortion is illegal” does not make the girls less scared. It does not suddenly make them want to keep the baby. Their fears must be addressed and they must be supported, and that ensures that their kids are born into loving homes with a loving well-prepared mother.

I think young mothers should have more support to not want to terminate a pregnancy. I think they should be given more options,

besides either keeping or getting rid of the baby when they get pregnant. I think being young girls still in school; they need a lot of mentoring and guidance. I think the fears that lead them to abortion should be addressed and treated.

I meet so many of these girls who say they do not know what to do and that they would rather just get rid of the baby. I would never go ahead and encourage them to. But they have no other options in our country because all we have is a law that says "DON'T!" and people that do not care much further than that. I am here saying there should be more than that. Let's tell them don't, and give them plan bs and cs. A law is not the solution. Okay, they have made the mistake – a mistake that whether we like it or not, we are partly responsible for in some way. We need to actually be human and be there for them, and for those babies. If that does not change, teenage girls will go on unsafely aborting the babies and putting all lives at risk until we address all the reasons why it happens. I keep emphasising that if the pregnancy does not happen, there will be no unwanted pregnancies to terminate.

I say we should protect life, but not by a law. We should protect life by actually being human and actually being Christian. There is nothing Godly about a Christian mother throwing out her daughter because she is pregnant. There is nothing Godly about the whole church judging her for the same. She is our daughter, our sister, going through a very tough time and thus requires our support - she needs us.

The law in itself does not solve the problem. Girls will not stop wanting to get rid of babies because there is a law.

We can support young pregnant girls. We could mentor them and talk to them and their families on how to support the pregnant girl so she does not even have to consider the option of getting rid of it. I do think we can do more than slate a law because I deeply believe it does not solve the problem. If the law worked there should have been no abortions by now. However, statistics show that the prevalence of unsafe abortions is in fact increasing.

I for one have a great mother. I come from a great family - an accepting one. If you are like me, you are one of the lucky few but please acknowledge this fact, most young girls cannot say the same; that is why we must stand together as young girls and boys with our sisters - that we all need to do better and maybe only then will we not even need a law to protect life.

By the end of your teens I want you to know better than I did. After going through how heavy this topic can be, I need you to protect yourself from getting pregnant by all means. **DO NOT** allow yourself to say it was a mistake. **DO NOT** do it to try to keep some guy interested in and committed to you. If he loves you, he will love you, baby or not. **DO NOT** say it just happened. Keep your brain intact and do not get carried away with emotions. Protect yourself!

In a case where you do get pregnant in your teens, I need you to know your story is not unique. Someone else has been through this. Someone has been pregnant before you. Someone younger



than you has been pregnant before. Someone has had their pregnancy rejected by the man they slept with. Someone has gone through the fears you have today. Someone, before you, survived this.

By the end of your teens I hope you have a better reality than we did. I hope you are more educated about sex and pregnancy than we were. I hope you got the knowledge we did not have. I hope you are given more options than we were.

By the end of your teens I hope doctors and other responsible adults are there to more than just help you get rid of your baby. I hope there is a thorough process of mentorship through which they can advise you on all your options, and better yet advise you to keep the life and consider other options.

By the end of your teens I hope you do better than we did. If your friend gets pregnant, I hope you are more supportive than you are judgmental. I hope you can hold her hand better than you can cast her away. If you do get pregnant, I hope you do not feel alone. I hope you know we stand with you. I hope you know you can reach out to help. I hope you know you have the choice to be a mother or not, but that you do not need to take your baby's life – that you have more options. I hope you also know that the choice to have the baby is yours alone, and that I surely hope you choose to have the baby even if it means that you give it up to a home. I hope you do not get so scared and so alone to resort to terminating the pregnancy. Reach out, talk to someone. Express how you feel, talk

about your fears, seek true guidance. Remember, we stand with you.

And bigger than all that has been said, and knowing all this - by the end of your teens, try your best to abstain from sex. I know you are human, curious and sometimes weak - it is simply human of you. Please be very knowledgeable about the choice you make as they can change the entire course of your life. There is no rush. Sex has a lot of (usually lifelong) consequences and IT CAN WAIT!

## Chapter 10. LOSS AND GRIEF – DEATH

### **Definitions:**

#### ***Lose***

*Be deprived of, or to cease to have or retain (something).*

#### ***Loss***

*The fact, or the process of losing someone, or something.*

#### ***Die***

*To stop living*

#### ***Death***

*The end of the life of a person or organism*

#### ***Grief***

*Intense sorrow, especially caused by someone's death*

#### ***Grieve***

*Feel intense sorrow.*

I lost the first closest person when she and I were 14 – exactly 18 days before my 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. I have had many friends over my life, but I consider her closest because she was the first person I let get that close to me.

Losing her was traumatic, to say the least. She was the closest friend I had ever had and the shortest friendship I have ever had (not that I am very good at making friends). We met two months prior to her death, but I mourned her like we had known each other all our lives – because, well to me, it felt like we had. Do you ever just meet someone and feel like you have known them your entire existence? Like the moment you stepped in that friendship was like stepping into your past, present and future, all at the same time? That was Harriet for me. We met and instantly we clicked. From the first day, we talked day and night – I mean that literally. I was in Form 3, she in Form 2.

After class we would sit and we would chat – about everything and about nothing. After knocking off for the day at 8:30 we would sit and talk some more. It was normal back then. Everyone used the time “after prep” to catch up with their closest friends. She and I were different. Everyone would chat till about 2130hrs and retire to bed for the next day. Harriet and I would wait until everyone had slept and it was quiet outside for us to really start chatting.

When I think about it now – we did not do much. We never talked about much. Maybe that was all our friendship was; just being there. We found peace and contentment in that. We spotted shooting stars and made shapes out of stars. Speaking of it now makes it seem like a fairy-tale friendship – and perhaps it was, but mostly what we both needed – I to live on fully and she to perhaps die peacefully. We both had troubled childhoods and some broken relationships we needed to heal from, and in a way, and possibly in time – we healed each other more than we realised.

I bet now you are wondering, “why is she telling this story?”

I want you to know that I know one or two things about loss, in a way possibly different from yours, and the next person. But you know what we both have in common? We both have a hole, a void nothing and no one can fill. That is the thing about death – it robs us of those dearest to us but their existence remains, like a past we cannot just skip back to. It’s excruciating and extremely beautiful at the same time, like a frozen moment kept that way for as long as we leave.

Death freezes the existence of one person to us. It does not destroy the memory nor does it take away what we felt towards these people. It simply freezes it. You can’t love them more, hate them less or feel any other way. You might now realise how wrong your feelings about someone may have been now that they are gone, but that does not necessarily change your feelings about them. That is sad, yet at the same time brings some sort of happiness.

I mourned Harriet's death because it was the first death of someone close to me I had experienced. Nothing in my life had prepared me for it. To me it came as a surprise that someone could die so young. Sure she was sick, but she wasn't "dying". That never occurred as an option to me. I remember her calling me the night she died. As always, I told her to take her medicine. She said no, and, childishly, I told her never to talk to me if she doesn't. She called me about half an hour later to let me know she had taken her medicine and that her dad was taking her to the hospital. I wish I knew then those were the last words I'd ever hear her speak to me.

That is death. It takes. It does not give you room to prepare. There is no escaping it. Death is a thief. It robs. It robs us of precious lives. It robs us of futures. It robs us of plans. It robs us of love.

I mourned for at least two years, experiencing all the five stages of grief having not heard of them. According to [psychcentral.com](http://psychcentral.com), the five stages of grief are described in this way:

a. Denial & Isolation

The first reaction to learning about the terminal illness, loss, or death of a cherished loved one is to deny the reality of the situation. We tell ourselves “This is not happening, this cannot be happening”. It is a normal reaction to rationalise overwhelming emotions. It is a defence mechanism that buffers the immediate shock of the loss. We block out the words and hide from the facts. This is a temporary response that carries us through the first wave of pain.

I remember when one of my close friends called to ask me if I had heard about Harriet. I said yes. She asked me if I had cried. I said no. I did not understand why someone could cry about a friend’s sickness. I had told myself that I would give Harriet some time to rest and that I would check on her later in the day.

I was sitting on the couch watching most likely Hannah Montana on Disney TV when my sister walked into the living room crying and told me that Harriet had passed away.

I did not cry. Not immediately anyway. I asked her a few times what exactly she meant. I remember rushing to my cell phone and dialling Harriet’s phone number. I suppose I hoped that she would pick up the phone and tell me that there was a mistake. That my best friend was not dead, that we would watch for shooting stars together again, that it was simply a mistake.

I dialled her phone number as I knew it then by heart, and to my dismay it was not her voice on the other end of the line that picked up. A mourning teary voiced aunt picked up the phone and confirmed indeed that I was the last person Harriet had called the

previous night. Her father had found her unconscious shortly after she hung up the phone and he rushed her to the hospital. My best friend was pronounced dead on arrival.

My heart has never broken as hard as it did that moment, and it has broken a hundred times more over the past years because of that moment.

I rushed to my room. I grabbed my razor blade. I had watched a one scientific documentary that stated that if you cut your veins right at your wrist you would die a slow and painless death. I stood in my room for a moment genuinely contemplating taking my own life. I did not want to live in a world where Harriet did not exist. Her death brought unimaginable pain to me. I did not want to go on living without her.

It couldn't be. She would wake up, she could call me and tell me it was just a joke. She would say it was not true.

#### b. Bargaining

Psych Central (and I bet most psychology books) state that anger is the second phase of grievance followed by bargaining. However they leave a little room for variation in how one experience these stages. For me, second was bargain.

In grief, secretly, we may make a deal with God or our higher power in an attempt to postpone the inevitable. This is a weaker line of defence to protect us from the painful reality. I remember promising God I could be better, I could maybe even be perfect – that I could do anything He asked me to, if only he could bring my Harriet back to me.



I did not sleep that night. I failed to eat. I cried. I tossed and turned in my bed. I went through our text messages. I went through our letters. I traced her handwriting with my fingers.

Harriet never liked pictures. I had only one photo of her. I stared at that picture for a good while. I remembered her alive - her smile, her laughter, her being. How could she just be – no more?

We were two broken children. We talked about life, we talked about pain, we talked about healing. We found peace with each other. Just when I was just feeling wholly accepted by someone for the first time ever in my life, she was never going to be there with me again, never going to stay up late with me, never going to rant about anything with me again.

I recall the last days of her life. I was not the best of friends to her. I had been ignoring her. We never fought - it wasn't in our nature. I was avoiding her because my classmates said we were starting to look alike and walk the same. We were both bowlegged. I did not like that fact and she reminded me of what I hated about myself – teenagers! We spent less and less time together as we had done before but I was always there for her.

Whenever she felt ill her classmates would haul me out of class and I would go stay by her side. I would watch her sleep as I read my Nancy Drew Collection. I would get her food, check on her when she had returned from the hospital, make sure she was alright – and she was, always, up until that night. She was alright up until the first night she was without me.

Again I recollected my thoughts. She was sick, but she was not dying. How was she suddenly just gone? How was I suddenly all alone?

According to psych central, the normal reaction to feelings of helplessness and vulnerability is often a need to regain control –

If only we had sought medical attention sooner...

If only we got a second opinion from another doctor...

If only we had tried to be a better person toward them...

These were my thoughts as I was on the bus on my way to lay the closest friend I had to rest.

Maybe if I hadn't ignored her...

Maybe if we had never gone home for the holiday...

Maybe if I had called someone when she called me...

Maybe if I had taken the next bus to Lilongwe that night...

Maybe if...

Maybe if...

Nothing could heal me from my reality. I was alone, friendless, all alone. The one friend I had and treasured laid in state, cold, lifeless.

I begged God to give me my friend back. I crossed my fingers and hoped I would find her standing and waiting for me to scream “you’ve been pranked” as soon as I got in Lilongwe, her hometown, and I would yell at her and chase her around with a

deep sigh of relief that my best friend was, in fact, still alive, still here. Anything at all, in that moment, could have been better news than her death.

It wasn't so. I arrived in Lilongwe and I saw a long line of cars leading up to her house. If this was a prank, she had well gone out of her way tug at my heart. It was driving past all those cars and seeing all those broken hearts and distraught faces that I knew then, my best friend was gone. She was not coming back. I went through fluctuating phases of acceptance, denial, bargaining and depression all at once for a good part of that day.

I had hoped when I'd see her face and she would look back at me and smile. I had hoped she would wake up and talk to me. I wanted to hug her, feel her warmth and bring her back to me.

She laid there in her pretty white casket, dressed in white from head to toe. She looked so beautiful. She looked absolutely peaceful. To me, she just looked like she was just taking a nap, sick just one more time. She did not smile. She did not acknowledge my existence. She laid there at peace, back with her Maker. My person was no more. Our friendship was no more. My best friend was not coming back.

### c. Depression

Now having skipped anger before, you would expect it to be next – but it still did not yet come for me. In my case, I was not angry until I was very close to acceptance, for me. Up next was the most dreaded phase – depression.

They say, two types of depression are associated with mourning. The first one is a reaction to practical implications relating to the loss. Sadness and regret predominate this type of depression. We worry about the costs and burial. We worry that, in our grief, we have spent less time with others that depend on us. This phase may be eased by simple clarification and reassurance. We may need a bit of helpful cooperation and a few kind words. Most experience this type of depression but in my case, I was too young to worry about any of the above. What hit me hardest was the second type of depression.

The second type of depression, psych central says should be more subtle and, in a sense, perhaps more private. It is our quiet preparation to separate and to bid our loved one farewell. Here, depression is described as a process one experiences leading up to a loved one's death – something I truly deeply feel I was deprived of.

If it was up to me, I could have wanted to at least know my best friend was dying. I wonder if she knew. I was deprived of that option, one moment we were together, the next moment she was gone.

On the last day of the holiday, we got to the bus stop in the company of my parents to board the BT-MZ evening coach. I recall everyone's pity when they saw me. I did not like it. It crushed me. I said goodbye to my parents and got on the bus.

I kept my eyes away from everyone. I did not speak to anyone. Most presumed it was my grief. But to me it was more than that.

Losing her was one thing, but now I had to return to a place I had hated up until she showed up, and knew with all my heart would continue to hate now that she was no longer around.

I pulled my CD player and played “” as I had gotten the CD burned just before I left home. I curled up in my corner and my earphones keeping myself as far away from reality as I possibly could.

A friend walked up to my seat and pulled away my earphones. I was less than pleased but even less enthusiastic to react. She, with probably the most pity I have ever seen on anyone’s face, asked me the simplest question “are you okay?”

I remember just breaking down after than question. I don’t think anyone had asked me that since Harriet died.

#### d. Anger

As the masking effects of denial and isolation begin to wear, reality and its pain re-emerge. We are not ready. The intense emotion is deflected from our vulnerable core, redirected and expressed instead as anger. The anger may be aimed at inanimate objects, complete strangers, friends or family. Anger may be directed at our dying or deceased loved one. Rationally, we know the person is not to be blamed. Emotionally, however, we may resent the person for causing us pain or for leaving us. We feel guilty for being angry, and this makes us angrier. Remember, grieving is a personal process that has no time limit, nor one “right” way to do it.

It took me a while to get angry.

We can be angry at different people for different reasons. Maybe the doctor who diagnosed the illness and was unable to cure the disease might become a convenient target. Health professionals deal with death and dying every day. That does not make them immune to the suffering of their patients or to those who grieve for them.

Do not hesitate to ask your doctor to give you extra time or to explain just once more the details of your loved one's illness. Arrange a special appointment or ask that he telephones you at the end of his day. Ask for clear answers to your questions regarding medical diagnosis and treatment. Understand the options available to you. Take your time.

#### e. Acceptance

Reaching this stage of mourning is a gift not afforded to everyone. Death may be sudden and unexpected or we may never see beyond our anger or denial. It is not necessarily a mark of bravery to resist the inevitable and to deny ourselves the opportunity to make our peace. This phase is marked by withdrawal and calm. This is not a period of happiness and must be distinguished from depression.

Loved ones that are terminally ill or aging appear to go through a final period of withdrawal. This is by no means a suggestion that they are aware of their own impending death or such, only that physical decline may be sufficient to produce a similar response. Their behaviour implies that it is natural to reach a stage at which

social interaction is limited. The dignity and grace shown by our dying loved ones may well be their last gift to us.

Coping with loss is ultimately a deeply personal and singular experience — nobody can help you go through it more easily or understand all the emotions that you're going through. But others can be there for you and help comfort you through this process. The best thing you can do is to allow yourself to feel the grief as it comes over you. Resisting it only will prolong the natural process of healing.

For

*Harriet Maseya,*

My shooting star

09/11/1995 – 27/07/2009

*Thokozani Chalemera,*

My first friend

02/05/1995 – 03/05/2012

*Evans Ndiwo Banda,*

My truest guy friend

02/05/1994 – 21/10/2017

I miss you.

Keep resting darlings

*Till we meet again*



PART 3:  
THE  
DREAM

"It's not that I've always known who I would be," **Oprah** says.  
"It was just very clear to me from an early age who I wouldn't be."

## Chapter 11. PURPOSE

### Definition

#### *Purpose*

*The reason for which something is done or created or for which something exists.*



The chart above defines purpose by combining four core values – *Passion, Mission, Profession and Vocation*.

Before we talk about dreams in any regard, I always insist that every person must first find their purpose, align their goals with that purpose and make sure they use their talents and academic achievement through entrepreneurship or otherwise, to live out that purpose.

I believe that the presence of every single human being, the occurrence of every single circumstance is not by chance. I believe that God carefully planned every single happening and that your very presence on this earth at this particular time is for a reason.

Purpose in whole encompasses a number of things. These things must be carefully aligned for you to live out your truest purpose on this earth. You were not born to just live, pay bills and die – or at least I would rather believe you were not. There is a reason why you are here, on this day, in this exact time. There must be a reason why you were born to the family that raised you and that you experienced all the little details about your life so you could live your purpose. It is not being aware of that, which makes us lose it.

I am still in pursuit of what I can consider my purpose on this earth. Some days I feel like I have got it figured out. Most days I am absolutely lost - that is the beautiful part – that we are forever learning and that that's okay.

Now, purpose was segmented into 4 parts – Passion, Mission, Profession and Vocation.

## **Definitions**

### ***Passion***

*A strong feeling of enthusiasm or excitement for something or about doing something.*

### ***Mission***

*An important assignment carried out for political, religious, or commercial purposes, typically involving travel.*

### ***Profession***

*A paid occupation, especially one that involves prolonged training and a formal qualification.*

### ***Vocation***

*A strong feeling of suitability for a particular career or occupation.*

Having understood these four components of purpose, next is obviously to see how they individually work to influence and impact our purpose.

### ***Passion and Purpose***

Karl Moore on Forbes argues that we must combine our passion and purpose to live up to our full potential.

Every individual has gifts and talents that can and should use to make a lasting impact. Tying your gifts and talents with your personal purpose leads to a more successful and a significant career.

Karl provides four guiding questions to follow in identifying our purpose:

- How have your passion and interests evolved to shape your purpose?
- How do they connect to your interests and dreams from your early days?
- What pursuits would inspire and give meaning to you?
- What impact would you like to make on others?

Passion gives you the fuel to stay the course, and when it may not seem possible, you do it anyway. Passion must be channelled as a force for the greater good, a sense of being a part of something more and then need to give back – or else it can be counter-productive.

On the same, Karl identifies the four ‘S’s to help assess where you stand today, and help chart a path towards making a bigger impact.

**Struggle:** Life is a challenge with significant risks in meeting your needs.

**Survival:** The role is just for your security and it pays the bills.

**Success:** The role taps into your talent. Adds personal value by achieving or over achieving goals.

**Significance:** Creating excellence committed to a purpose that is bigger than you and is about impacting others.

How do you get started on your path to success or significance?

First, see where you are within the four ‘S’s above, and do a self-discovery to gain insights into your own gifts, talents, and passion. Identify an area of work where you have a strong desire and interest. Second, recognise your potential talents as you are experiencing some degree of success. Lastly, there needs to be a strong validation of your impact.

Our lives become meaningful through the impact we make on others, more than living and working just for ourselves. As we grow, our passion has to inspire others’ passions and dreams. I believe we exist to inspire – to inspire something better and greater than us. This almost becomes a challenge to us such that we aim to be the greatest we can be, so much so that any greatness that comes after us will be better, because it is greater than us.

*“As leaders we have the opportunity to bring people together to do something that is bigger than they are as individuals”.*

- **Shawn Baldwin**, Senior Vice President at Walmart Stores

It is also important to remember that our passion may well and will most likely change over time. We as humans are constantly changing because we are constantly exposed to new things. It is natural to be drawn to newer things and newer problems. In life you must try to make everything you do tie in and work together towards your purpose.

### ***Mission and Purpose***

Mission	Purpose
What we do	Why we do it
Operating a business	Sharing a dream
Strategic	Cultural
Inspirational	Aspirational (True North)
Creates "buy-in"	Instills "ownership"
Provides focus	Fuels passion
Building a company	Building a community
Laying bricks	Building cathedrals
Parking cars	Creating happiness

The word "Mission" is derived from a Latin word that means "To send". Your existence on this very earth is a mission – from God, from the Universe, from whatever higher power you believe in. You were sent here for a particular purpose, and that when you leave, you will have fulfilled that mission through your purpose and leave this world just a little better, because you were here.

Most organisations have ***Mission Statements*** – "*A written declaration of an organisation's core purpose and focus that normally remains unchanged over time*".

You as a human being need to have a mission statement too - not for everybody's viewing but for your personal checking. I believe you should treat yourself like a complete organisation – with objectives, visions and a mission. You must know why you are here, with an execution plan on how you will achieve your visions and goals and thus carrying out your mission.



## ***Profession and Purpose***

*“Your passion, your purpose, is something you love so much that you would do it for free.”*

Profession as defined is simply your day job – what you do every day to pay the bills. It is most times linked to your educational background and will thus be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Profession is a fundamental part of who we are and by the end of your teens – maybe even before the end of your teens, you should have already explored and aligned your profession with your purpose.

I would not exactly call it a regret, but I certainly wish I knew better when I was making my professional career choice. Back then, it was as simple as “What are you good at? Sciences? Consider Medicine”. Our professional choices were made based on almost solely our academic abilities with a complete disregard for who we were as human beings. We chose careers that most times just satisfied our parents’ egos. They had dreamt of being and failed to become the doctors, engineers, accountants and so much more than it was such a big dream for us on their part that we achieved what they could not. We cannot blame them for this. As parents we will probably make the same mistakes and it is my hope that we are more aware of this fact and refrain from imposing our dreams on our children.

When I have a public speech to make and I am considering the right things to write, I normally tap into what I would have loved to know. So most times I have asked myself how exactly I figured

out who I was going to be. I chose my college course because I was told it was the best thing you could do at Chancellor College, then. It was partly fuelled by my ego, a lot of immaturity and immense desire to please my parents. I did not think of anything beyond that.

If I had revisited that decision only looking at grades then, I would have opted for medicine. I am naturally great at sciences. Objective things are my arena. It would have made absolute sense to me and everyone around me. I would most likely have aced it too. Today, however, I can tell you that I would have made a terrible doctor and I am glad I was not given that chance.

And this brings us to the last segment of discovering your purpose:

### ***Vocation and Purpose***

“How did you know what you wanted to do with your life?”

I emphasised that this is a question that I normally have to ask myself. Five years ago I did not know I wanted to be a writer. It took me a lifetime of reading, about eight years of writing and five years of trying pretty much everything else, to discover that all I was happy doing was writing. In writing I had all my passion, it felt like I was sent to earth to do this, I could apply everything I have learnt to impart knowledge in this field, but most importantly, this was like a calling to me. I could do this for a lifetime for free for as long as my bills were paid and I was left alone to do as I please.

It was through repetitive mistakes that I discovered who I was going to be. It was trying over and over again, making as many

mistakes as I could until I found what makes me feel alive. It was a process of elimination really – trying out the thing I thought I could have enjoyed until I realised I wouldn't, and then moving on to the next thing and trying them all out until I found that one thing that was always there.

So by the end of your teens, allow yourself to make as many career mistakes as you can. Try out the little things you can. Is it sports? Try it. Fail. Succeed. Restrategise and allow yourself to start again.

Callings (to a life in which you feel fulfilled, of service, connected, vibrant and truly alive) don't necessarily shine like guiding beacons ahead.

*Allison Ottaway* discusses 10 ways to find your truest calling in this life, these are:

1. Notice dreams and signs.

The subconscious has ways of letting you know if you're heading in the right direction. Pay attention to the things that happen in your life, the people you meet, the things you notice, the places you are drawn to.

Prioritise expressing yourself in whatever way you find enjoyable.

If you want to be fully yourself and find your path in life, creativity is not a luxury - you must carve time for it.

2. Think about what you used to love.

Our callings are very often things that we loved to be or do when we were very young – before we were asked to ‘fit in’. How did you play as a child? What did you love to do? What were you curious about? How did you think?

### 3. Notice what feels good.

Callings feel good. When we are doing what we are supposed to be doing, we are connected, joyful, expressive, loving and purposeful. Notice times in your daily life that you feel connected, joyful etc. – What are you doing? Who are you with? What are you allowing?

### 4. Turn down the distractions.

Distractions, like TV, shopping and drinking, serve only to keep you stuck. Turn them down in your life and allow possibility in. This will be hard at first - it’s easy to use these things to stop you facing things you don’t want to, or having to answer difficult questions - but consciously opting for stillness over diversions, or emptiness over a life chock full of ‘busy’ is choosing to open a dialogue with yourself and your path.

### 5. Pay attention to what keeps coming back.

The things that are always true for you or won’t go away are really important in discovering your calling. Are you always making up amazing stories to entertain the children in your life? Every time you feel at a loss do you find yourself in the kitchen, creating? These recurrent things are giving you clues as to what will really satisfy you, pay attention to them.

6. If you've got a hunch, give it a go, try it on for size.

Finding our true path in life isn't passive. It won't appear in a puff of smoke. It's only through trying out an activity that you'll know whether it's the thing for you.

8. Find a way to connect with something outside yourself daily life.

Get out in nature. Practise a simple meditation. Find a community of like-minds and share. Take up yoga.

9. Shake up your routine.

Getting out of your routine, changing your environment, and carving some time for yourself can work wonders. Shifts in perspective, connections and realisations are more easily explored and nurtured when you give yourself the space physically and emotionally.

10. Be patient.

Don't expect your calling to be delivered to you. Discovering and honing your path in life will be a continual part of your journey. Be compassionate to yourself, knowing that where you are right now is the best place. Treat yourself, your practices, and the world with patience.

In your journey of discovering who you are going to be, you will have to make sure these four fundamentals are aligned. You will have to know what you are most passionate about, so much so that it feels like it is your very calling and your mission to this life. More importantly, you will have to turned that passion into your profession to live out your absolutely best life and in order to achieve that, first you must step foot in a classroom.

## Chapter 12. EDUCATION

Education is not overrated.

I wish somebody had told me that more often, especially at the end of my teens. I guess my parents and most people around me tried to but I was too stubborn to listen and I pray by the end of your teens, you are much better than me.

When you are a dreamer and a visionary, you start to think you are above the system, that you do not need any education to get where you need to go. When you are an artist, a footballer or talented in some other way, academic education tends to lose meaning to you overtime. You start to ask yourself why you must keep pushing for something you are not particularly good at, when you could just focus and excel in your area of expertise. I still emphasise that academic education is essential to the development of our brains - but education is more than just what you learn inside the classroom.

Let us begin with the very definition of the word. For something where we get most of our definitions from, Education is one of the least defined words.

### **Definition**

#### ***Education***

*“The systematic process of gaining knowledge and skills through study and instructions.”*

I hope in your teens you are at least still in school. If you are already done with your education, congratulations to you.

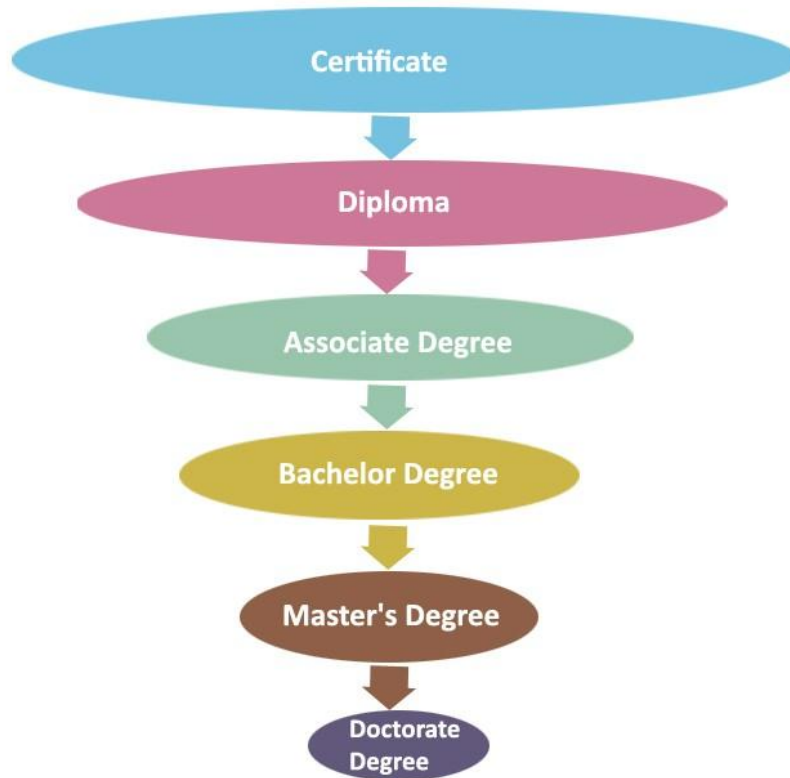
I will start from the very basics of education, before we get to why we need it.

The person providing the instruction is known as a *teacher*. And, the person who receives or gains education is called a *student* or a *pupil*. You already know all this, but it doesn't hurt to state it again.

School education includes **primary** or **elementary** education, **secondary** education and **higher secondary** education. This level of education happens in a setup called a **school**, which I hope you are currently in while you are in your teens – and hopefully much longer after that.

After completing the school education, a student can join a college, university or institute for further studies. Some can also develop skills in a particular trade by enrolling themselves in Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) institutes. Where *tertiary* education is involved, there are also various stages as outlined below:





The aim of education is not to develop one single virtue – but *to produce healthy normal human beings who understand the meaning of life and what it demands from them*. I find that statement very important in understanding education. It is not just about learning sciences, social-sciences and languages. It is about creating wholesome beings.

From childhood to youth, we must be constantly reminded by educationists and psychologists that the fundamental law of life is co-operation, not domination or conflict. If we are intellectually and morally brought up on co-operation, most of our troubles would be at an end and life would be much healthier, richer and nobler than ever before.

There are many reasons why education is important. Sanjay Tripathi recognises 17 reasons below:

**1. World Citizenship:** If you want to serve the world as a global citizen and associate with people from all parts of the world, education is a must. Education produces citizens who are men of intellectual and moral integrity, who are neither fanatical nor cynical, but are public-spirited, tolerant and wise. Education aims at producing ideal human-beings. These people are truly cultured, wise, tolerant and public-spirited. Of course, different ages have different conceptions of ideal men.

**2. Promotes National Interest:** Education also promotes national interest. Highly educated people have a critical intelligence of an exceptional order. They can form independent conclusions from given facts. An educated person has the wisdom and knowledge to work for the good of the country. The doctors, engineers, scientists, soldiers, police-officers, IAS, etc. all work together in protecting the national interest.

**3. True benefactors of human race:** We must praise great writers, scientists, humanistic philosophers, profoundly religious men with abiding faith in spiritual values, social reformers and other men with a constructive genius because these educated men alone are the true benefactors of the human race. If it is your desire to be among these, you cannot do so without attaining a good level of education.

**4. Backbone of developing countries:** Education is the backbone of developing countries. Sustainable development of

economy and society is closely related to education. The most important resource of a nation is its human-capital. Educated people have more understanding of themselves and of the others. They have the ability to become entrepreneurs, scientists and agriculturists. The world of today is driven by Information Technology and education in this field may become a deciding factor for the future economic development of developing countries.

**5. Moral, spiritual and ethical values:** Educated people promote equality of opportunity. Any privilege, when based on merit alone, is bound to be more moral because it has to justify no unmerited privilege, advocates no ethical system which promotes class-feeling or social snobbery and does not defend anything which is unjust or ethically wrong. The aim of education, whatever the social system, must be not only to disseminate knowledge, but also to stimulate the questioning spirit.

No man, however brilliant, however gifted, can be considered truly cultured unless he identifies himself with the wellbeing of others.

**6. Education produces good citizens:** Education also produces well-cultured and wise men. It is often said that the children of today are the citizens of tomorrow. If children of today study hard to become good students, then they will surely become good citizens in future.

**7. Enjoy life:** Education enables young men and women to develop all the latent powers and faculties of their nature and to enjoy a good life.

**8. Freshness of approach:** A sound education system encourages freshness of approach. Education should bring out the best in the student, not stifle his mind.

**9. Transmit national culture:** Education is an important medium to transmit national culture to the students. Of course, educational institutions are not the only agencies through which the culture of the nation can be passed on to the younger generations. The home exercises a powerful influence on the youthful mind. Religion and churches also have a big role to play in making men truly cultured and moral. But schools and colleges have also a contribution to make to the transmission of national culture.

**10. Character:** Education helps in building the character of a person. The educational teachers make attempts to give their students a moral outlook.

**11. Literacy:** Education enables a person to become literate. Literacy refers to the ability of a person to read and write. Literacy is important not only for children but also for adults.

**12. Curiosity:** An educated man should have infinite curiosity, the passion to know and understand things in a scientific way, with complete objectivity.

**13. Wisdom:** In democratic countries, educational institutions earnestly try to arouse intellectual curiosity, satisfy the appetite for more and more knowledge, and develop the critical spirit which alone brings wisdom.

**14. Intellectual discipline:** An educated person cultivates intellectual discipline and intellectual humility. He is an earnest seeker after truth and knowledge with an open mind.

**15. Seeks perfection:** A truly educated man always seeks perfection. He is not a specialist who has perfected only his body or the intellect or the mind but one who seeks the development of all his faculties.

**16. Earn a livelihood:** Education enables a boy or a girl to earn his or her living. It is true that employment does not depend upon intellectual attainments alone. It is also determined by the stage of economic development of a country. However, there are chances that an educated person will get a good job with income sufficient to earn him his livelihood. An educated person can easily meet the basic material needs of life.

The school system has simply been put in place as a method to provide education, and prepare you for the life that is to come. It exposes you to variable knowledge, in a way also to help you identify where exactly your passion lies. Some may find science as their passion. Others will choose astrology and so on. Personally, without realising it, I found my passion in the library. I spent most of my breaks and free periods in the library scavenging through world books and novels. I developed a passion for words and storytelling. I became more inquisitive about life and all the things that happen in it. I found and lost myself in all these books and I have the school system to thank for that.

By the end of your teens, use education as a means to your dreams. Do not let the education become your life, but learn as much as you can, about everything at your disposal. It is the only way you will discover your true passion – through attaining knowledge.

Use education to discover what makes you come alive, and when you find it, invest in learning even more about that field. Read, read, and read. All the knowledge is available if you choose to take it in. And if the knowledge you are looking for does not yet exist, then you have found your placement. In a way, I say explore your passion until you find that one void in the world. Discover it, and spend your life time filling it. That one thing you wish existed, is the reason you are here on this earth – to create it. Use your God-given talents to help you achieve that purpose.

## Chapter 13. TALENT

*“Hard work beats talent*

*When talent does not want to work.*

*The one who is hungrier to reach the top*

*Will always get there first.”*

***– Fearless Motivation***

### **Definition(s)**

#### ***Talent***

- 1. Natural, usually creative or artistic Gift, Aptitude or Skill*
- 2. The natural endowments of a person*

### **Identifying your talents**

A talent, as defined by Wikipedia, is *the skill that someone naturally has to do something that is hard*. You could consider that, it is an ability that someone is born with. People say they are "born with a talent". Talent is basically a high degree of ability or of aptitude. Someone who has talent is able to do something without trying as hard as someone who does not have that particular talent.

A good place to start in identifying talents is by gaining a clear idea of your skills. List the things you are naturally good at, as well as

the things you have become good at through repetitive effort. Write down the skills you use every single day, the things you learnt in school, and the things you enjoy doing in your free time.

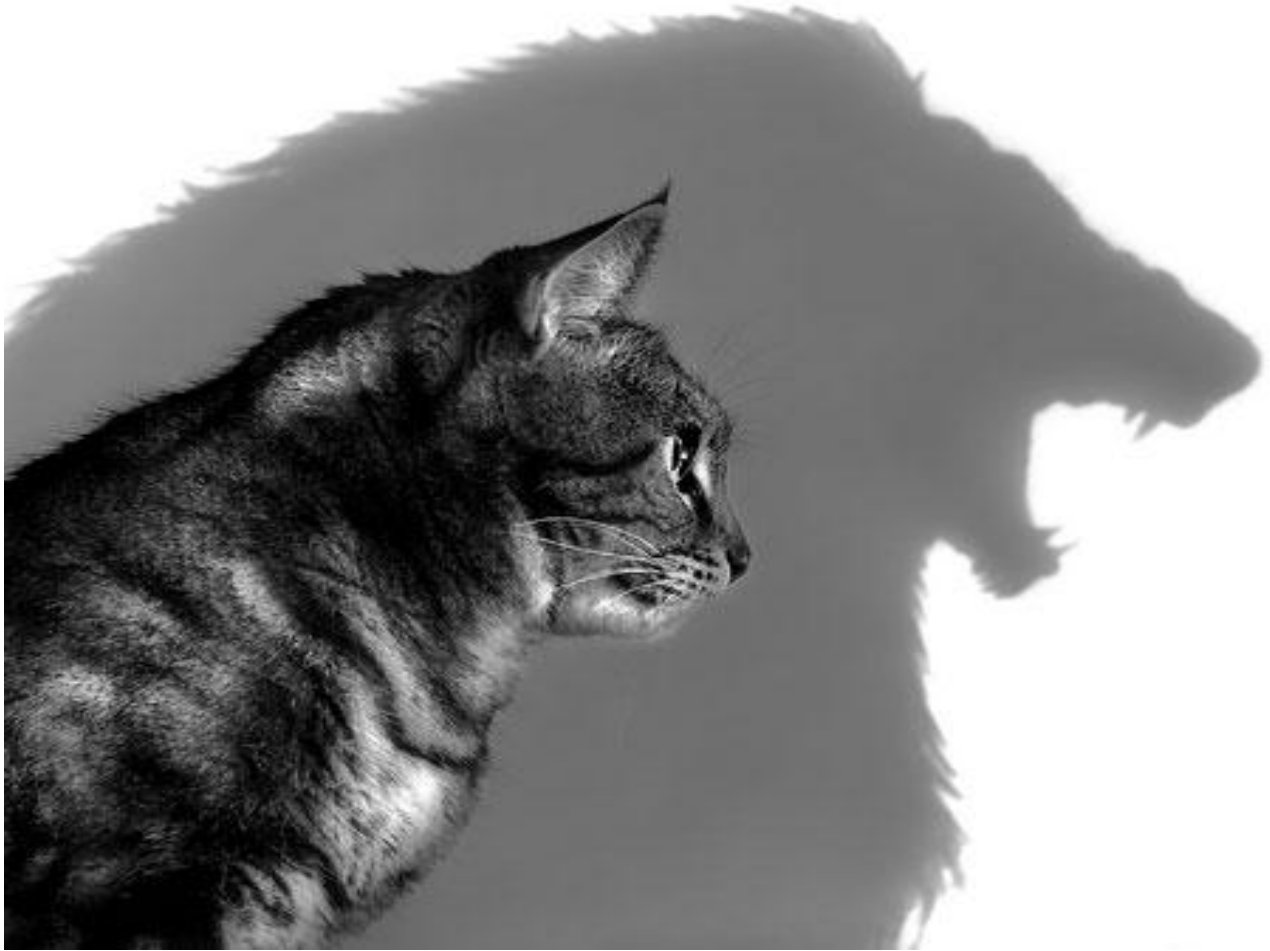
Dr. James R. Rickabaugh states that more important than anything is to believe that we actually do have talent.

It may seem obvious, but simply believing that we have **talent** and **potential** changes how we view ourselves. We are more likely to convey confidence and positive expectations of ourselves. Our language shifts toward opportunity and success. Better yet, when we see developable talent – we communicate it in dozens of ways. The opposite of this is true. We are insecure, timid, and are not very clear in communicating exactly what it is that we want – and exactly the reason why you need to identify your personal talents.

Important to note is that even if someone has talent in something they still have to work very hard if they want to be very good at that thing. Some people become quite good at something not because they do not have much talent, but because they are willing to work very hard at the skill. I have seen people who were never good singers at all become quite good at their craft through repetitive effort.



## Nurturing Your Talents



Firstly, think of your talents as the cat here. Those are the talents naturally given to you. The Lion shadow is ultimately an idea of what you can become if your talents are to be nurtured correctly.

List all these talents one by one. When you've listed everything you can, look over your list and consider whether any of these skills and talents might be marketable.

It is one thing to be good at something – but even more important is if it can be used to bring something of value to both you and

other people. Think of whether you have talents that other people would be willing to pay for. Please try your best not to rush through this as this is the process of trying to get an idea of the work that would make you feel passionate and fulfilled – your purpose.

Secondly, and of importance is to acknowledge that your dream is NOT just about you. It's about all the lives you will touch when you do what you were meant to do on this planet. By holding yourself back, you are denying others something special that you were destined to share with them. We are each special and unique, and each one of us has something to offer this world that no one else can. By denying our own talents, we deny others the gift of what we have to share. **You owe it to yourself and others to be ruthlessly honest about your passion(s).**

Thirdly, be sure to MAKE TIME to explore your talents! Check out courses and classes in your local area, or do a few internet searches for groups of likeminded people. Give your interests a chance, and one (or more) of them might blossom into a life-changing passion.

**Dr. James R. Rickabaugh** discusses how to nurture other people's talents. I used his approach to try and see if we can use the same approach to nurture our personal talents through ourselves and using **mentors**.

By the end of your teens you are going to need to be ready to take up some tasks and activities you are good at and may even enjoy but have never taken the interest in pursuing them and allow

yourself to gain experience and skills through being engaged in them. This will also require openness to learning from those that are already good at what they do.

This step can be difficult for some of us, either because we are too proud to ask for help – or we think that only other people can do it right or because we do not like being the centre of attention. This process also likely will involve making some mistakes and missteps. We need to provide enough room for small failures to occur, while remaining close enough to our mentors to seek help or to “pick up our pieces” and learn from the experience.

Once you have a clear list of your existing skills and talents, make a check mark next to the ones you use on a regular basis, whether in your work or personal time. Ask yourself, can any of those skills be enhanced or strengthened? Can you enrol in a continuing education course to expand on any of your skills? Note all the possible opportunities to grow and develop what you already have. If any of the skills on your list are not things you truly ENJOY doing, cross them off the list and do not consider them as career candidates. That doesn't mean you'll never use those skills, just that they won't be your main focus. They can come into play to work together for the good of achieving something you enjoy more.

Look at the talents that were not checked as something you use frequently. Would you like to spend more time developing those talents? Again, if they don't thrill you, cross them off the list. If they do interest you, consider ways to expand and develop them further.

Finally, make one more list of things you've always wanted to do but haven't yet. These will be things you can explore gradually to see if they have potential to be your passion.

Once you have identified this list of your talents and are set to nurture and develop them, it is now time to make sure they are aligned with your goals.

## Chapter 14. GOALS

*‘When you discover  
What you will be in your life,  
Set out to do it  
As if God Almighty called you  
At this particular moment in history to do it.  
Don’t just set out to do a good job.  
Set out to do such a good job  
That the living, the dead or the unborn  
Couldn’t do it any better..’*

- ***Martin Luther King, Jnr***

### **Definitions**

#### ***Potential***

*Having or showing the capacity to become or develop into something in the future.*

Potential is basically what you are capable of doing, achieving and becoming.

#### ***Goal***

*The object of a person's ambition or effort; an aim or desired result.*

By the end of your teens, you should know these few things about goals:

1. You, and only you, define “your” success.
2. If your goals do not scare you, they are not big enough.
3. The sky is the limit. Scratch that, there is no limit.
4. You can be great, you can be amazing.
5. The best things in life are on the other side of terror.

To be great at anything in this world, three things must coincide – your potential, your goals, and your purpose.

Having taken some time to figure out what the purpose of your life is going to be, identified your talents and acquired the education and skills to pursue those talents – the next step is to identify achievable goals to turn that purpose into a reality. And that is why we must understand why we must set goals.

### ***Why Goal Setting is important***

*Are your daily actions bringing you closer to your goals?*

3. Goals are not achieved magically and overnight.

It feels comforting to hear motivational speakers tell you how to achieve the goals to make your life prosperous. It is inspiring to read books and articles on how to overcome the challenges in life to achieve your desired goals. But, the key to achieving any goal is actually executing your plans.

4. Goals create a road map for success.

You can define goals as the targets toward which you point your life. After you decide who or what you are going to be, the next step is to draw up an achievable plan on how exactly you are going to get it done.

5. Goals give you a starting point and a destination to reach.

Written goals act like a control. They help you to see where you are going, what changes you need to make, and if you are progressing towards your prize.

To achieve your life goals, you must make sacrifices, stay committed, overcome challenges and work your plans. If you set goals that are focused on God's vision for your life, you will find that, you will grow more and accomplish them easily. Goals help you focus your attention on your purpose.

When you have a definite target, it positions you for real success.

*“If you do not know where you are going, any road will take you there.”*

6. A specific goal puts you on a direct course of action.

Goal achievement requires a committed, concentrated and consistent work ethic to make your dreams a reality. The process of writing your goals helps you clarify what you desire to do,

understand the importance of pursuing them and commit yourself to making them happen.

7. Goals have value only if they help you develop and improve yourself or other people's potential.

When you measure your goals progress, you stay on track, you see your target dates and experience the excitement of achievement that will propel you to reach your goals. The secret to achieving your goals is to get started. When you set actionable goals, make sure they are in agreement with your overall vision. A goal worth pursuing is not something that anyone can easily talk you out of achieving.

8. Defining your goals in writing impresses them upon your heart and mind.

Goals are reached one step at a time.

When you commit yourself to your vision and express it in achievable goals, you provide yourself with the motivation of where you are going and how you anticipate getting there. Goals help you to determine priorities and direct you to focus on what is important.

Setting goals in the seven areas of life (spiritual, physical, financial, relational, social, professional and mental) empowers you to live your vision with power.



Goals are planners' heaven.

I enjoy setting goals, realistic and unrealistic ones to test my potential. This may include; general life goals, career goals, success goals, at times relationship goals and even just daily goals.

It's great to have big goals to aim for, both in your career and in your personal life. However, it becomes problematic if the distance between where you stand right now and your goals is too large.

Big goals are inspiring and motivating at first, but they can become intimidating if they're not accompanied by actionable steps on how to reach them. There is the need to set actionable steps – stepping stones, for you to get where you want to be; this why you need to break down goals into achievable tasks. Of course, before you break down your goals into tasks, you need to have goals - not just goals, but very well-established goals.

It is important for the goals you set to be as specific as they can be. Be crystal clear about what you're aiming for, and write that down. This is not an easy process and can take months and years to figure out. But instead of being frustrated by the idea that you might never get it right, you need to start!

*“To achieve **greatness**, start where you are, use what you have, do what you can.”*

- *Arthur Ashe*

*The process of achieving goals*

After establishing your goals, next are these few steps to make sure you follow through to achieve whatever it is that you wish to achieve.

### **Create a map of milestones**

Goals can usually be divided into milestones. Milestones are still big steps, but they help you think of your goals in terms of what you need in order to achieve them. You can begin to understand what is necessary to achieve each single milestone, and what you need, to get there.

### **Come up with a task list**

Now that you have a map of your milestones that you want to achieve, you can come up with a task list. You don't need to map out your whole goal.

### **Start with the first milestone and go from there.**

I believe in doing action more than words and as such, define everything you set out to do with doing words (verbs). Make sure you really are clear about what each task entails. If any task is still vague, then break them down even further.

### **What kind of support do you need to achieve each step?**

Before you begin working away on each task, try to anticipate if there is anything you need in order to complete each step.

Figuring out what is needed to complete each task is even more important within the workplace, since team members often depend

on one another in order to complete their task (s). If one team member does not have the tools to complete one task, the whole team will be set back.

Think of all the practical things that you will need to complete each task, whether it's knowledge or professional help. Start making plans in advance to make sure that what you need will be there when you need it.

### **Create a timeline for your tasks**

Once you have your task list, it's time to create a timeline for your tasks.

The timeline will allow you to see what needs to happen for a task to begin, and what tasks can happen alongside each other. But this does not refer to multitasking! For example, beginning your nutrition plan and jogging three times a week can happen alongside each other, but you need to buy your running shoes first.

Creating a timeline for your tasks will help you see your goals in a more achievable light, and will also help you be more efficient about how you spend your time.

### **Work toward completing each task**

The big advantage of breaking down your goals into tasks is that it creates small, actionable and achievable steps for you to take. There is no doubt that you can complete each individual task, which gives you the confidence to move swiftly toward your goal.

When you break down goals into tasks, you break down what might seem impossible into a sequence of doable steps.

Stick with it

Last in setting your goals is a commitment to stick with your plan, no matter how hard or rough it gets. Remember, nothing worth having comes easy and everything worth doing is worth overdoing.

*“What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals.”*

- **Zig Ziglar**

*“Work*

*To make the dream*

*A possibility*

*For the next generation.”*

- **Marcus Garvey**

Now that you have an idea on how to go about pursuing your goals to achieve your purpose, then you must really decide what it is that you are achieving and what approach you are going to take to achieve it. Are you an entrepreneur? Are you not? How will you get to your goal?

## Chapter 15. Entrepreneurship

*“Dream big.*

*Start small.*

*But most of all, start.”*

- ***Simon Sinek***

*“Entrepreneurship is not what you do,*

*It is who you are.”*

- ***Wiza Jalakasi***

Macklemore in an interview when asked about what kept him pushing for his dreams, responded in something that drove me through the hardships of my first year after University as an entrepreneur.

*“It was me realizing that if this doesn’t work out,*

*Then I will have to get a 9 to 5,*

*And I really do not want to do that.”*

- ***Benjamin Hammond Haggerty (Macklemore, Musician)***

I can never say for sure the exact day I become an entrepreneur. If you ask me I will tell you I have always been an entrepreneur. I had two drives:

3. The need for the money

4. Using my creativity to make money.

I had the first business I can remember when I was 17. I started selling beauty products and doing women's hair - which later expanded to opening my first salon. I also started selling ladies' shoes. When I was a teenager I did not have much to lose. I saw a business opportunity and I jumped at it.

I was excellent at hairdressing (I still am) and used it to make some money for myself. I stumbled upon some original beauty products that were being supplied at an extremely low cost and made a lot of money off of that selling them back in University, at their market price.

A few months later I found someone that was selling shoes I liked at a fairly low cost than I would expect and invested in reselling them for him. That business did well but was not as successful as I would have planned it to be. In all, these ventures were great learning curves for me as an entrepreneur and I am very glad I got those lessons very early in my entrepreneurship career.

I had employees that required to be paid monthly. I also had to pay monthly rentals for the shop, provide the supplies and make sure everything was up and running.

The first thing I would love for you to know by the end of your teens is that not everyone is cut out for entrepreneurship. The world as a model would not work if everybody was an entrepreneur and nobody worked for anybody. Entrepreneurs are simply the creative minds behind great ideas than need, usually, more than a few people to bring to life. Not too many people are called to entrepreneurship and that is the very reason we find many

people struggling to prosper in business because they pursue entrepreneurship for the sole purpose of making some money.

Creating a business requires discipline and knowing exactly what you want to achieve out of a business. It is more than just making money. Entrepreneurship is problem solving. A business should have a proper model that identifies a problem, with a working plan on how the solution is to be achieved. It is only the business model that aims to fill an existent gap in society that really stands the test of time.

You do not choose entrepreneurship. It chooses you. Life naturally presents you a problem and says to you “You are going to solve that”. Your journey as an entrepreneur begins there. You keep thinking about how exactly you are going to solve the problem and sooner or later you eventually stumble upon a solution to the problem.

It usually takes a lot of time, a lot of plans that are tried and do not work out. It takes a lot of people that usually have to be changed until you find the perfect team. In the end, as an entrepreneur, you get it right.

This generation speaks so much on entrepreneurship that I feel we have started to make those who do not wish or feel in their hearts to pursue entrepreneurship as if they are the lesser. We have made it seem like it is dishonourable to be anything less than an entrepreneur that I fear we might destroy the very people we need to create great things in this life.

Let us be honest – I have so many great ideas and I am always buzzing to create a new thing. I never run out of ideas and I believe I am blessed in that way. But to bring all these things to life, I usually need more than a few people to bring anything to life. The people I work with actually end up making more money than me from anything I ever create. That is the plight of an entrepreneur and any start up. You make the sacrifice of giving other people your everything as long as you keep the rights to your product/idea. If you are incapable of doing that – you’re really not cut out for entrepreneurship, as your drive is not really creating but your return.

It takes my acknowledging how great my colleagues are and constantly reminding them what value they bring to the business. It will always be my idea but when created – it becomes our business. The only way we can all work whole-heartedly to bring ‘my’ idea to life is if we all look at this as ‘our’ business and pour our entire beings into the model. The business manager, accountant, even clerk and whoever else involved has to work with all their hearts and that is the only way great things in this life are created.

So I say, it your responsibility to find exactly where you want your career to take you. Search within yourself and discover if an entrepreneur is who you are called to. If it is, please read up and research on all you need to know about that. If you find that you really are not cut out for entrepreneurship, please take heart and accept that fact. Do not for a second look down on yourself for that discovery. Look within yourself and find what sparks the



creativity in your soul. Find that thing or someone working towards that thing and see how you can make yourself useful in that. When you find your exact role in that quest, you are very close to finding your purpose. Find it, explore that work and really pour yourself in developing that skill.

Being an entrepreneur is as good as being a doctor, an engineer, a manager and so on. You can however be an entrepreneur in your specific field because you were called to fill a gap or solve a problem in your society as life presented to you. However, being a very highly paid doctor working for an existent hospital is no less honourable. Find exactly where you fit best and where you can deliver to the maximum of your capacity and pursue that.

*‘If a man is called to be a **street-sweeper***

*He should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted,*

*or Beethoven composed music,*

*or Shakespeare wrote poetry.*

*He should sweep streets so well*

*That all the hosts of heaven and earth*

*Will pause to say*

*Here lived a great **street-sweeper***

*Who did his job well.’*

*- Dr Martin Luther King Jr.*

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## **My Journey as an Entrepreneur (Finding my Chiphwelemwe)**

### **Definition:**

#### ***Chiphwelemwe***

*A group of things that work together for a common good.*

I actually never saw myself being in the entertainment industry in Malawi. Growing up, I always saw myself ending up in Hollywood... possibly acting, doing music, dancing, designing – or something! I am naturally a creative and happen to be talented in different fields. I have a creative's good eye, a very sharp and creative mind and a steady hand. That makes it easy for me to master most creative arts. I can write, I can draw, I can design. I can do photography/videography and recently I am a self-taught Video Editor and Producer. I am also a speaker and a closet poet. All these skills are self-taught and I hope to get better with time.

Late 2016, I completed my undergraduate studies. That for me meant that I could no longer blame myself of not chasing my dreams on my education. At the time I was already a blogger. I have been blogging for close to 5 years now. What started as blogging about my hair journey later became blogging about my personal style and eventually travel and lifestyle. I found myself in Travel and lifestyle Blogging. Why? My heart was right there. I enjoy travel and lifestyle, so what I wrote was from my heart. Discovering that, was a push for me in the right direction... writing from the heart.

Now going through my early 20s, I have been on a pursuit of figuring out who I am going to be. I am sure in my heart I have absolutely no interest in paper work and can thus not hold down a job as a social scientist, an economist, a demographer or a Monitoring and Evaluation Officer (which are all my academic qualifications). At most I will work as a (visual) researcher (MA, Gender and Media) in the field of Gender Equality (Women's Empowerment). I figured I cannot be a musician because God knows I am only good at mimicking voices (yes, choir life!) I cannot be a designer simply because I only love to design and make what inspires me – and usually that for myself. I cannot be an actress – I lack the patience and none of the industries interest me that much anymore – not forgetting the inexistence of one right in my country.

So then began the journey of finding my “Chiphwelemwe” as Karen (Miss Malawi First Princess 2008) said to me at Mzuzu fashion Week in 2016. She told me to find a way to use all my talents to work for one greater cause. That was easier said than done. It did not happen overnight. I guess we can say it took me 5 years. It will most likely take me my whole life. It has really been a challenge. I, surprisingly, still face the same challenges when more opportunities are presented to me... in deciding whether I can or cannot take on certain roles.

I started my TV show at 22, something I had always wanted to do. My TV show started with my love for Television. I grew up watching way too much TV and I knew from a young age I wanted to be on TV. My parents say I used to go behind the television

screen and ask them if they could see me through the TV from the back when I was a very little girl. When I was growing up I always dreamt Hollywood. Modelling seemed like an easy way to get in but I was too short.

It came easy to me when I decided to “Just do what you love” but not immediately either. I love travelling, I love eating, I love exploring, I love having heart to heart conversations with people, I love designing and I like solving problems. So, the show idea did not come that easy. In fact, from the day we decided to start producing the show, it has changed so much you would not be able to recognise what we wanted in the beginning. That was finding the “Chiphwelemwe” and it really was God’s doing, not mine.

I think entering the entertainment industry was easy for me. I started organising events when I was in University - Chancellor College, University of Malawi, and became friends with a number of Malawian Celebrities. Heart to heart has always worked for me. I have met more online and at events, and most of them have become my very close family.

Knowing most of them makes it easy for my work. They are my friends, my family and it is so easy working with them and putting them on. Combining all my talents, I opted to be the one putting people in the Entertainment Industry in Malawi on. I opted to be the cheerleader for their talents, and the bouncing board for what they want the world to know about them. Small and budding as it

is, the Malawian Entertainment Industry is actually a beautiful place to be.

As women in the industry, you could expect it to be catty (because women are like that sometimes!) but I think this is the one industry I have seen women truly stick together. I have fallen in love 10 times over with women in this sector pursuing their different passions. I guess that is the thing about true creativity – it leaves very little room for hate. It is hard to be hating someone unless you are competing with them. As long as you are treading your own path, all you have is love to give to other women.

Most importantly, seek God. For the past 4 years of my life, I have truly trusted God with my life – through triumphs, pain and loss. I have let Him take the lead every time, and I am convinced He has my best interests at heart and I can't do it on my own. Let Him dictate your life and you just be an agent executing His plan through your life.

Value #1, remain true to yourself . Authenticity can be spotted from out of space, and that is the one thing that will make you stay relevant in any type of field. A pretend act only lasts for so long.

Manage your brand, whatever it is, truest to you and your creative talents. You can use some of my strategies but only if they apply to you. I would very much advise you to live your own story your way, as did I mine – and I am still writing it.



PART 4:  
THE  
DISCIPLINE

“If you can’t fly, run.  
If you can’t run, walk.  
If you can’t walk, crawl  
But by all means, keep moving.”

- Martin Luther King, Jnr



## Chapter 16. GROOMING AND PERSONAL HYGIENE

Dr. King discusses discipline of all forms in many of his speeches. When we discuss being successful we obviously have to tackle all the segments that matter, and your personal hygiene is definitely one of the most underrated.

Grooming is normally discussed alongside Personal Hygiene. It ranges from the way you appear, to the way you smell. Little details like your posture and how firm your handshake is leave an impression longer-lasting than you could imagine.

### Types of grooming

#### **Mental Grooming** **-Personality**

- *-Values,*
- *-Goals,*
- *-Identity and*
- *-Behaviour.*

#### **Business Grooming** **-Professionalism**

- *-Business,*
- *-Communication and*
- *-Technical Skills*

#### **Spiritual Grooming**

- *-Word*
- *-Prayer life*
- *-Fasting*

#### **Personal Grooming –** **Physical Attractiveness**

- *-Clothing*
- *-Hygiene and*
- *-Attractiveness*
- *-Social awareness*

It would be easy to just say “Physical Appearance does not matter” but first impressions do matter. People will most certainly judge you from how you first present yourself. Of course, there is the window where you can redeem yourself – but why take the chance?

While you should be judged by your inner worth, it is often a first impression that determines whether someone will take the time to let you reveal that inner worth. No doubt wardrobe plays an important role in appearance, but it's often personal grooming (and hygiene) that make the biggest impression.

In the business world, the top personal grooming issues that attract attention and complaints are hair (especially body hair), dental hygiene, scent, and hands and nails. Poor grooming detracts from what you have to say and can impede your ability to build relationships with others.

## Personal Grooming habits

- Grooming involves all the aspects of your body:
- Overall Cleanliness
- Hair.
- Nails.
- Teeth.
- Uniform
- Make-up

We live in a generation that is liberated and I am most grateful for that. This is not a segment to tell you to get rid of your African features or to ask you to look something other than yourself. I tell all my mentees to discover their personal style, but that at the end of the day it is neat and odourless.

Below are some tips (that I learnt) for making sure the first impression you make is the right one.

### **Hair (Men)**

- Whatever your style, keep your hair neatly trimmed and arranged.

- Body hair should be trimmed so it doesn't appear above your collar or below your sleeves. If you're wearing an open collar shirt, chest hair should be groomed so it doesn't stick out.
- Facial hair (including ear and nostril hair) should be neatly trimmed.
- Eyebrows should be neatly trimmed.

### **Hair (Women)**

- Keep hair neatly styled and clean. Avoid dramatic or severe styles that can be distracting or can project an unprofessional image.
- If you colour your hair, keep up with maintenance.
- Eyebrows should be neatly trimmed, shaped and arranged.
- Be aware of any facial hair issues and take care of them as needed as to your comfort.

### **Dental Hygiene**

- Always maintain fresh breath. Brush both your teeth and your tongue.
- Avoid foods with strong odours such as coffee and onions before meeting people.
- Use mints or a breath spray after meals and before meetings.
- Never chew gum in the workplace.

- Use whitening toothpaste or invest in a bleaching system to ensure a bright and welcoming smile.

## **Scent**

- Take at least two showers a day.
- If you do not like taking showers, always use deodorant and a strong antiperspirant. I would still recommend a shower first.
- Keep deodorant or body wipes in your office or workspace.
- If you perspire heavily, keep an extra blouse or shirt in your office so you can freshen up as needed.
- Avoid over-scenting with cologne or perfume (especially to mask body odours). Over-scenting can be just as offensive as unpleasant body odour.

## **Hands and Fingernails**

- Keep nails neatly trimmed to a length of your choice, filed, and clean at all time.
- Don't grow fingernails to a length that is too distracting.
- If you are in the corporate world, I would advise the use of a neutral shade of nail polish and avoidance of the use of embellishments.
- If your hands tend to look calloused, keep moisturizer on-hand so your hands are not abrasive when shaking hands.

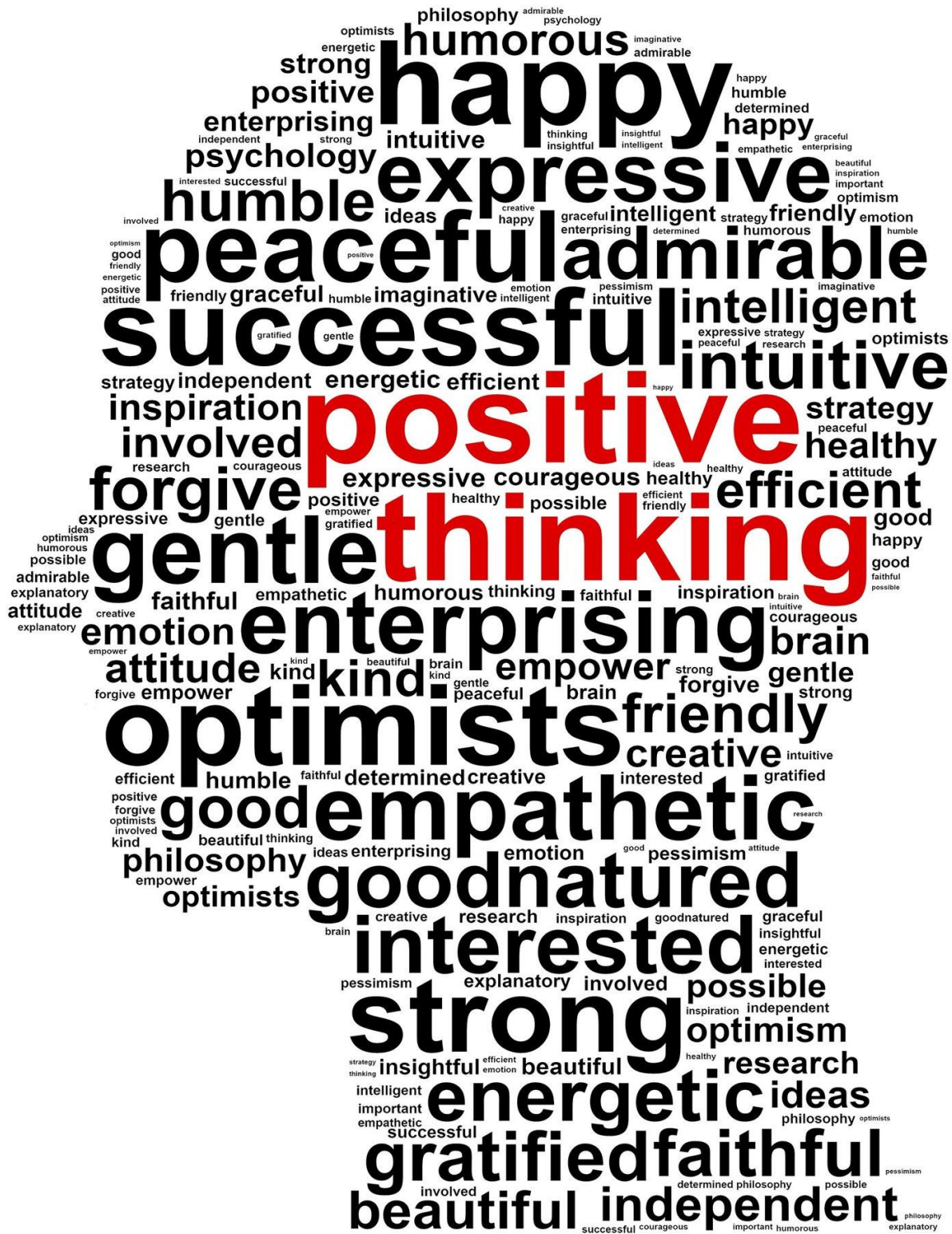
## **Other Business Grooming Tips**

- If you're new on a job, ask if there are workplace policies regarding appropriate attire, facial jewellery, tattoos and other grooming protocol.

Your appearance is important not only in making the right first impression but in building long-term relations that rely upon mutual respect and understanding.

By following these simple rules you'll be one step closer to building solid business relationships and having the most professional appearance possible.

Chapter 17. HEALTH AND FITNESS



## Definition

### ***Health:***

*“The level of functional and metabolic efficiency of a living organism.”*

*“A state of optimal well-being that is oriented toward maximizing an individual's potential. This is a life-long process of moving towards enhancing your physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, and environmental well-being.”*

*“A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”* **WHO, 1948.**

In 1986, the WHO further clarified health as:

*“A resource for everyday life, not the objective of living. Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities.”*

I think by now you can understand how deeply intertwined all the factors in this book are; and how essential they are especially for a teenager's wellbeing. I have discussed times I was not emotionally healthy. You will hear of things like physical health, psychological health, public health and so on. There are so many types of health. I have also talked about mental health regards happiness. There are all forms of health. But what does health really mean?



According to Christian Nordqvist, health is not just absence of disease but a state of overall wellbeing. Health is more than just physical fitness. That is why I chose to discuss health and fitness in the same segment. Physical fitness is simply a figment of healthy living. This book ultimately is about living a healthy life.

The word "**health**" refers to *a state of complete emotional and physical well-being.*

The definition of health here is physical, mental, and social wellbeing, and as a resource for living a full life. Health does not refer only to the absence of disease, but the ability to recover and bounce back from illness and other problems. A healthful diet, exercise, screening for diseases, and coping strategies - all enhance a person's health.

## **Types of health**

Mental and physical health are the two most commonly discussed types of health. There is also much interest in "spiritual health," "emotional health," and "financial health," among others. All these forms of health have been linked to lower stress levels and mental and physical wellbeing.

## **Physical health**

I am standing here staring at myself in the mirror and I am thinking "I love my body!!!"

I wasn't always this way. I am 22 now. When I was a teenager, much like you I had some issues with my body. I was a late bloomer so you can picture my devastation there. As all my friends started developing their boobs and hips, I maintained the figure of a fairly cute boy.

What changed, then?

Firstly, my self-perception changed. A lot of changes had to happen for me to even be able to see myself as beautiful. Secondly, well I did finally bloom. I know what it is like being a teenager. You are practically high on hormones, wanting every next guy/girl to have a crush on you – and well what easier way to achieve that than simply being physically appealing. Am I right?

By the end of your teens I am going to ask you to be gentle with yourself, gentle with your body. You are a magnificent living being and you should let yourself experience all of life's phases at the time they come to you. Do not be pressured to look a certain way because science said it will be this way. Bodies are different. They will always be. Learn to love yours each step of the way.

The last step in my loving my body was starting to work out. I have always been skinny, so as you can imagine I told myself I do not need to work out! Man, was I wrong about working out? I have been fit for about 2 years now and I would love, by the end of your teens, to know what I know now.

Physical wellbeing involves pursuing a healthful life. Maintaining physical fitness, for example, can protect and develop the endurance of a person's breathing and heart function, muscular strength, flexibility, and body composition.

Below are some of the working out benefits that have worked out extremely well for me.

*1. Boost happiness levels*

It's not a coincidence that you feel better after a good workout: It's science. Studies show that people who exercise, whether it is a mild, moderate or vigorous workout, have more pleasant feelings than those who don't. With experience you will also gather that you are happier on days when you are more physically active than usual, meaning that upping the ante on workouts can provide even more of a happiness boost.

*2. Learn to set and achieve goals*

Setting and achieving fitness goals is an incredible self-confidence boost.

Relationship between physical and mental fitness

By discovering the power of setting goals by committing to reaching an exercise milestone and then working out exactly how you'll achieve it, you can enjoy the benefits of exercise and the confidence that comes along with it.

*3. Reduce your risk of heart disease naturally*

Well, I hope you are in no way prone to heart disease at your age, but this is definitely a fitness benefit in the long run.

#### *4. Sleep better*

If you have trouble sleeping and instead are prone to tossing and turning, exercising can help you sleep better. By strengthening circadian rhythms, exercising can help keep you more bright-eyed during the day and as a result brings sleep at night. It also promotes better quality sleep.

#### *5. Get an energy boost*

When you're feeling exhausted, the last thing you might want to do is squeeze in a workout. But, according to experts, that's exactly what you should do. They found that low-intensity exercise, the equivalent of a leisurely stroll, experienced a drop in fatigue levels *and* a 20 percent energy boost.

#### *6. Increase strength and flexibility*

If strength training and stretching aren't a part of your fitness routine, it's time to incorporate them. Although many adults engage in cardio activities, quite a few stay away from resistance training and muscle-building. I mean if anyone had told me to build my muscles as a teen I would have laughed in their faces! What? Muscles? No way! I will look like a man!

Wrong!

Strength training, whether you're lifting weights, doing bodyweight exercises or incorporating yoga moves, helps improve muscle strength and muscle mass, as well as keeping bones strong – and these are particularly important as we age. Plus, increased muscle

helps your body burn calories more efficiently long after your workout is over (if weight loss is your goal).

Stretching increases your body's flexibility helping everyday tasks become easier. It also sends more blood to your muscles, improving circulation, and can lower the risk of cardiovascular disease. Just a few minutes a day of deep stretching can make a huge difference.

### *7. Improve memory*

Are you constantly misplacing your keys or struggling to recall names? That is literally me. My keys and I are not good friends at all. I am excellent with faces but names are not my area of expertise. Exercising regularly can help jog your memory. A 2014 study found that aerobic exercise, like running or swimming, boosts the size of the hippocampus, the part of the brain responsible for memory and learning, in women with a recognised risk factor for dementia.

### *8. Increase self-confidence*

This is possibly one of the biggest driving factors for anyone who keeps fit. I started working out because I was tired of sucking in my tummy to take bikini photos. Yes I wasn't fat, but I wasn't particularly thrilled at seeing a little bulge around my middle section whenever I took a picture.

By the end of your teens I want you to remember that fitness is a very personal journey. Your goals and my goals are not the same and they do not have to be. In as much as certain body types are

naturally more visually appealing, everyone has different goals. Some want to be as thin as a stick. Others, like me want to gain some mass and just be thicker. Others want to go the whole way and be body builders. Hell! some people are even perfectly fine being bigger or smaller. Whatever your goal, do not let someone talk you into believing their body-goals are the ultimate standard.

“Do it for yourself!”

- *Chim Chisiza, Artist*

One study found that “the simple act of exercising and not fitness itself can convince you that you look better.” With so much emphasis on our outward appearances in society today, it’s comforting to know that one of the benefits of exercise helps people feel better about themselves and how they look naturally.

#### *9. Perform better at school/work*

A study found that students/employees who worked out before school/work or during their lunch hour reported feeling less stress and being happier and more productive than days when they skipped a workout. Not only that, but they also performed better on exercise days.

#### *10. Become less susceptible to disease*

I am in no way a fan of being sick – ever! I will take anything that will guarantee me no sickness for a good while.

From “fortifying your immune system against future cancers” to “reducing the risk of breast cancer”, regular exercise helps protect your body.

Researchers aren't entirely sure how exercise boosts immunity, theories range from bacteria being flushed out of the body to a reduction in stress-released hormones that might increase the risk of illness. We can wait for the science to catch up, but it is clear that engaging in moderate to intense exercise benefits your body in ways we're not even sure of yet.

### *11. Live longer*

Well, I am personally not that ecstatic about living too long but an extra 1.8 years couldn't suck.

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There are so many types of workouts that you can do, and I would advise you to try them all until you figure out exactly what you like. You can do cardio, yoga, weight training – and even some type of sports you enjoy doing. One of my ultimate favourites in the gym is boxing. I have many reasons to love boxing, and from personal experience:

#### *1. Boxing gives you a flatter belly – Fat burning*

I specifically started working out to lose weight around my waist area.

Boxing is a high intensity work out and it can burn 500 calories a session. This means that you're not only burning calories during the work out but as well for hours after the session has ended. Typical cardio does not have these same effects. If you're considering losing weight, boxing for fitness is for you.

## *2. Muscle toning*

Taking interest in fitness had me looking at fit girls and continuously wishing I looked just a little like them.

Punching is a fast repetitive action that produces taunt toned taunt muscles – different from other work outs. If you wish to tone your body, boxing is for you.

## *3. Building up stronger bones and ligaments*

Who likes weak bones and ligaments? I have Arthritis genes in my blood and will do my level best to make sure my bones and joints are in good shape for a while.

Resistance training strengthens your bones and reduces the progression of osteoporosis. Your joints, tendons and ligaments will also get stronger in response to working against resistance.

## *4. Improved cardiovascular fitness*

I had the worst cardiovascular fitness. If I run for more than a minute, you will catch me panting and almost about to pass out. Improving that is my consistent fitness goal and I keep getting better at it. Being a skinny girl, I have to stick to High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) – things that you will come across once you take real interest in your body.

Boxing is a full body movement so when you throw punches a huge number of your body's muscles are contracting at the same time. This makes your heart and lungs work overtime to pump blood containing oxygen all around your body.



Boxing will force your body to adapt by making your heart and lungs better at delivering oxygen.

*5. Improved muscular endurance*

Boxing requires your muscles to contract repeatedly causing the muscles involved to fatigue. With training, your muscles can keep contracting for longer durations without getting tired.

*6. Build a stronger core – improved core stability*

My core has always been an issue for me. There is something I find visually appealing and emotionally satisfying seeing people control their core be in Yoga, Dance or Fitness itself. I have always wanted to perfect my handstand and I need my core to be strong to be able to do that.

Anything that causes your body to become unstable requires your core muscles to work harder to keep you balanced. Boxing requires lots of fast rotational movements and these core muscles will develop to allow you to punch hard without losing your balance.

*7. Stress relief*

I took up boxing for the first time when my second boyfriend was getting on my last nerve. It would just get the anger and frustration out of my system.

Hitting stuff can make you feel really good! Take out the stresses of your normal life in a safe, controlled environment. It will leave you calm and relaxed and ready to tackle whatever curveball life throws at you next!

*8. Improve your overall strength and power*

Correctly thrown punches use your legs, hips, glutes, core, obliques, back, shoulders, chest and arms. Punching against resistance causes all of these muscles to contract with more force and speed, developing further your strength and power.

*9. Improved coordination and body awareness*

Moving lots of parts at the same time requires a good connection between your brain and your body.

*10. Increase self confidence*

Well, we already discussed the confidence bit.

Mastering the techniques involved in boxing often make people feel pretty good! The better your technique, the more force you can put into your punch. The noise you hear when you land a strong, accurate punch right on the sweet spot of the focus pad is so satisfying!

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That is just one more example of my favourite exercise. I am not saying my favourite should be your favourite, but rather that you explore all the options you have, find what you enjoy and make sure it aligns with your personal fitness goals.

**Mental health**

Mental health encompasses a person's emotional, social, and psychological wellbeing. Mental health is as important as physical health to a full, active lifestyle.

It is harder to define mental health than physical health, because, in many cases, diagnosis depends on the individual's perception of their experience. Mental health is not only the absence of depression, anxiety, or another disorder.

However, this entire book has in fact broken down bits of mental health from the chapter of self-love, to how you handle everything else in your life. All those bits are components of your mental health and I wish you mental health by the end of your teens.

Your mental health depends on the ability to:

- enjoy life
- bounce back after difficult experiences
- achieve balance
- adapt to adversity
- feel safe and secure
- achieve your potential

Physical and mental health are linked, however, an example would be when a chronic illness affects your ability to complete your regular tasks, this at times would lead to depression and stress.

In return, a mental illness such as depression or anorexia nervosa can affect body weight and function.

It is your duty by the end of your teens to be aware of your mental health and use that information to better manage your life. The best way to maintain health is to preserve it through a healthful lifestyle, rather than waiting until you are sick to put things right.

As a teen you will most likely choose unhealthy habits to satisfy some of your insecurities. As a result, you will find that your health commitments are only short-lived. You will fail to commit to yourself fully. Maintaining wellness and optimal health is a lifelong, daily commitment.

## Chapter 18. TIME AND MONEY MANAGEMENT

*How could you live today if you could die tomorrow?*

I find beauty in the essence of time. The fact that all we have is right now – that we will not live this second, this minute, this hour, this day ever again. I find myself most times appreciating the beauty but at the same time terrified of the fragility of time.

### **Definition**

#### ***Time***

- 1. A point of time as measured in hours and minutes past midnight or noon*
- 2. The indefinite continued progress of existence and events in the past, present, and future regarded as a whole.*

#### ***Money***

- 1. A current medium of exchange in the form of coins and banknotes; coins and banknotes collectively.*
- 2. The assets, property, and resources owned by someone or something; wealth.*

#### ***Management***

*The process of dealing with or controlling things or people.*

#### ***Time management***

*The process of organising and planning how to divide your time between specific activities.*

#### ***Money management***

*The process of budgeting, saving, investing, spending or otherwise overseeing the **capital** usage of an individual or group.*

We know of the saying

***“Time is Money”***

We will discuss how these two topics are interlinked, but separately in this chapter. By the end of my teens, I definitely wish I had managed my time and my money better than I did.

**Time management**

*“Being busy isn’t the same as being effective”*

I always wondered how it is that some people got more done than I did in the same 24 hours that we all had and yet we all seemed to be equally as busy.

It seems that there is never enough time in the day. I later learnt that some people achieve so much more with their time than others because of good time management.

The highest achievers manage their time exceptionally well. By using the time-management techniques, you can improve your ability to function more effectively – even when time is tight and pressures are high.

“Time management” refers to the way that you organise and plan how long you spend on specific activities.

The benefits of time management are many and they include:

- Greater productivity and efficiency.
- A better professional reputation.
- Less stress.

- Increased opportunities for advancement.
- Greater opportunities to achieve important life and career goals.

Failing to manage your time effectively can have some very undesirable consequences:

- Missed deadlines.
- Inefficient work flow.
- Poor work quality.
- A poor professional reputation and a stalled career.
- Higher stress levels.

*“When you take my time, you have taken something from me that is irreplaceable.”*

- ***Bishop T.D. Jakes***

Rachel Campbell identifies 7 things you should do to manage your time better.

1. List what you have to do
2. Create a life schedule
3. Be flexible but realistic
4. Allow time for planning to avoid repetition
5. Avoid Procrastination and Distraction
6. Exercise to clear your head
7. Review and assess your schedule

And well a bonus point from me

8. Have fun and relax!

Good time management requires an important shift in focus from activities to results.

Spending your day in a frenzy of activity often achieves less, because you're dividing your attention between so many different tasks. Good time management lets you work smarter – not harder – so you get more done in less time.

## **Money management**

Back then, when I was a teen, I remember being most times broke, and the other times – at most, above average. It was the time that I had my first businesses, the time that I tried out one too many things where money management was concerned, a time I learnt a thing or two about balancing my time and my finances.

First let us talk about money management

Being in your teens, and depending on your career path, these things are most likely true:

1. Your income is minimal

But this is okay because,

2. You do not have many bills to pay

Our financial status strongly varies depending on our different circumstances. It may depend on who you are, where you come from and at what stage of your career you are on. It may also depend on what sort of family you come from and so on.



However, the average teen (and even a person in their 20s) is broke and trying to make ends meet.

In my teens, I did a number of businesses. I have always had an entrepreneurial mindset. Whether that was driven by the right things back then, I am still to find out, but I do know that as I grew up I started being in need of money. I started seeing things I liked in the world, and then I learnt that to get those things, you need to be in possession of money. As a teen, you also naturally start to feel less uneasy about asking your parents for every little thing. The independence starts to kick in and you take more chances than you should.

By the end of your teens, (and by this I mean later teens), try out at least one business idea and turn it into a reality. You will meet a lot of hurdles. It will most likely be unsuccessful, but you will have a lot to learn. You might lose some money, but as a teenager I hope it won't be as much as you could have lost if it was later in your life.

Venture into that business with one goal and that is to learn - to learn the basic principles of conducting a business. Be okay with the idea that you might not know everything, be okay with the fact that you may and will most likely fail, and be open to learning. Do your ultimate best, but be open to failure and learning from your mistakes. More importantly, set out to learn how to manage your finances.

## **Managing your finances.**

### ***Create a budget***

The first step to taking control of your finances is doing a budget.

It will take a little effort, but it's a great way to get a quick snapshot of the money that comes in and goes out.

Setting up a budget means you're:

- Less likely to end up in debt
- Less likely to get caught out by unexpected costs
- Able to spot areas where you can make savings
- In a great position to save up for a new phone, a new laptop, a holiday or something you might need.

To get started on your budget, you'll need to work out how much you spend on:

- Living costs
- Family and friends (presents...)
- Travel (car costs, public transport...)
- Leisure (holidays, sport, restaurants...)

If you're spending more than you have coming in, you need to work out where you can cut back. This could be as easy as making your lunch at home, or leaving out some things that you do not need.

You could also keep a spending diary and keep a note of everything you buy in a month.

***Be flexible***

Life is unpredictable so try to review your budget and your spending if there's a change, or at least every couple of months.

You might get a pay rise, which means you can save more, or you might find your household bills increase.

### ***Paying off loans***

When you start circulating money, you will learn that the process of borrowing money for the purposes of starting out is essential for growth. However, if you have loans or owe money it is important to make sure you don't break the terms of your agreements.

Sometimes we bite more than we can chew. In such circumstances I ran back to my parents with tears in my eyes for help. It could have been a possibility that they may not have always been there to bail me out and if so, it needed me to become more responsible in my doings. If you've missed loan payments or if you're behind with so-called 'priority debts', take advice from a free debt advice charity straight away.

### ***Set a savings goal***

Some people find it hard to get motivated about saving, but it's often much easier if you set a goal.

Your first step is to have some emergency savings – money to fall back on if you have an emergency, such as a boiler breakdown or if you can't work for a while.

Try to get three months' worth of expenses in an easy or instant access account.

Don't worry if you can't save this straight away, but keep it as a target to aim for.

The best way to save money is to pay some money into a savings account every month.

Once you've set aside your emergency fund, possible savings goals to consider might include:

- Buying a car someday without taking out a loan
- Taking a holiday without having to worry about the bills when you get back

### ***Investing your savings***

As your savings grow, make sure you invest them in things you find lucrative or even at times your friends' start-up businesses.

One thing I have found most essential in time and money management is savouring your moments.

*“The moment you find yourself in the past or the future, worrying - refocus yourself right here right now and find something right here, right now, that you can savour.”*

- ***Mel Robbins***

### **The Art of Stopping Time**

I recently saw the book “The Art of stopping time.” I am yet to read the book, but it got me thinking of ways I could stop time to

just appreciate and enjoy my life just a little bit more. I came up with the few pointers I think could be of help:

Being grateful for the little things you have leads to happiness.

List all the things and people you are grateful for.

Let the people know how much they mean to you.

Love does not always need reciprocity. That you have injected love into the universe should be enough, and that sooner or later, love will come back to you.

Staying present in the moment - be there when you choose to be in a moment otherwise do not be there at all. You will be amazed at what astounding details we miss out on when we are continually fleeing through life.

When you are going through some lows, perk up, pick yourself up, dust yourself off and say what can I do?

And when you feel like time is dragging and you simply can't wait to get to the end of time – remember to enjoy the process.

*“If I hadn't had the past 10 years, I would not have had the past year, or my present.”*

God placed all the best things in life on the other side of terror.

If you can balance your time and your money among other things, you are well on your way to living a happy and fulfilled life.

## Chapter 19. SUCESS AND DISCIPLINE

*“With little discipline you do little things.*

*With a lot of discipline, there is nothing that you cannot do.”*

**- Carlos Ghosn**

*“Success is a journey.*

*You have to be consistently successful,*

*That is when you are successful.”*

**- Priyanka Chopra, Actress**

### **Definition:**

#### ***Success***

*The accomplishment of an aim or a purpose.*

#### ***Discipline***

*The practice of training people (or the self) to obey rules or a code of behaviour, using punishment to correct disobedience.*

If you ask any successful person about their secret to their success, on their list of things will most likely be “Discipline”. This means that they have trained themselves to say – for every action, there is a consequence, be it positive or negative. This is no coincidence. To excel at anything, first – one must be very clear of what it is that they set out to do (purpose). Secondly, one must have a good sense of self-discipline and control over what exactly it is that they do. Everything we have just discussed in this book could be

pointless if you choose to be undisciplined and do as you please. Discipline is essential to live a very well-balanced life.

Ultimately, I hope this book in a way teaches you how to be successful in all areas of your life as a teenager. Success is not linear. It is not just achieving one thing. Being successful means you do well in everything that you do and you do well every single time. So being successful demands a lot of discipline.

*“Success is neither magical nor mysterious. Success is the natural consequence of consistently applying the basic fundamentals.”*

- ***Jim Rohn***

Being successful is not complicated.

You can start today on a journey that will take you to a future where everything you have ever dreamt of is possible and achievable.

## **Define Your Success**

I did a speech a few months back for a Dzenza Secondary School students under “No Child Left Behind” Organisation. I was not given a topic to speak on, but that topic was close to my heart then.

“If you do not know where you are going, any road will take you there”

By the end of your teens, you must define what success will look like to you. Your definition of success may and will most likely change over time and by all means – give yourself room to be

wrong and revisit your decisions overtime. However, do not let this deter you from making the decisions.

Anthony Moore discusses 14 principles you must master to become successful. I identified eight principles that are most relevant to you as a teenager:

### **1. Most People Will Never Be Successful.**

*“Successful people do what unsuccessful people are not willing to do. Don’t wish it were easier; wish you were better.”*

- ***Jim Rohn***

Most people choose comfort over growth. They see the price for true success and say, *“no thank you.”*

Moore refers to this group as the **“Mediocre Majority”**. These are the people who are unwilling to trade comfort and stability for the pain of growth.

Success is not free. It comes at a price, normally a big one. To grow, first, you must change, and change requires that you shed old habits and adopt new ones. It demands you to sever ties with toxic individuals. Anything is possible if you are willing to pay the price.

The choices to become financially independent; to have extremely rewarding and intimate relationships with your friends and family; to become fit and healthy; to experience complete emotional healing are all available now.



But most people won't take these choices. They are not easy choices to make and commit to. Each of them has a high cost.

Change is a choice but most do not make it. They continue to live in ordinary, average lives, just like everyone else around them. Why, you ask? It is easy. Staying the same is easy. Change is difficult.

By the end of your teens, make sure you are not a part of the "Mediocre Majority". Make sure you take the active route to changing and be prepared to pay the price for your change.

## **2. Evolving is Painful.**

Moore explains that becoming a better version of yourself requires time, energy, humility, and study - that you must become a young, teachable student again, over and over, you must be able to admit, *"I don't know."*

At the beginning of this book, I urged you to suspend all that it is that you think you know. There is more you don't know that will be revealed to you over the course of your studies and your self-discovery. The worst thing you can do to yourself is to insist that you already know everything.

Most people react to criticism by choosing pride, stagnation defensiveness and immaturity over humility and massive growth.

Once you decide to become someone who is open to correction and teaching, you become an unstoppable force.

*"Every next level of your life will demand a different you."*

- ***Leonardo DiCaprio***

What got you here won't get you there.

*“Mastering success means mastering the art of constantly becoming a better version of yourself.”*

- ***Anthony Moore***

### **3. The Obstacle is the Way.**

This is actually a book by ***Ryan Holiday***.

*“Within every obstacle is an opportunity to improve our condition.”*

- ***Ryan Holiday, The Obstacle is the Way***

I always say that I am everything that I am today because of everything I have been through. All my challenges and hurdles built me into the relentless woman I became. Solving difficult problems and overcoming frustration and fear allows you to develop patience, poise, and peace.

Becoming successful often means an entire transformation in almost all the parts of your life. The relationships, finances, health, and personal habits of a successful person often look extremely different from those of the average person.

### **4. Becoming Extraordinary Means Giving Up a “Normal” Life.**

There are a lot of habits that you have seen among your peers that you can identify as normal. Normal is easy. Normal is not challenging. It does not make you a better person.

Moore defines “Normal” as buying things you don’t need, to impress people you don’t like, with money you don’t have; binge-eating an entire pizza while binge-watching an entire season of a TV show; sleeping in as late as you can. Normal simply put is “the way things have always been done.”

But to live “extraordinary” is different.

If you want to live an extraordinary life, you’ll have to start acting very differently from how everyone else acts.

There was the discussion in an earlier chapter that blacks do not read. Having coming this far in the book, I am convinced you are already extraordinary. You are reading, doing something so basic yet against the norm of this generation. Moore explains that, being extraordinary means buying books, taking online courses, and conference memberships instead of buying alcohol and luxuries that you don’t even need.

Most people don’t prioritise the characteristics of an extraordinary lifestyle.

*“Would you be as successful if you followed all the rules and always behaved and never took chances? No, you’d be just like everyone else, scared about failing and worried about being liked.”*

- **Tim Grover**

## **5. Consistency Beats Intensity.**

Often, the stronger and faster opponent gets beaten by a weaker, slower adversary.

In the long run, it is not about intensity, it is about consistency. It is not the individual with the greatest starting position or motivation that usually wins; it is the person who can last the longest.

Take this example of Will Smith speaking on what makes him successful.

*“The only thing that I see that is distinctly different about me is, I’m not afraid to die on a treadmill,”* he explained.

*“I will not be out-worked, period. You might have more talent than me, you might be smarter than me, you might be sexier than me, you might be all of those things you got it on me in nine categories.*

*But if we get on the treadmill together, there are two things: You’re getting off first, or I’m going to die.”*

Success is all about consistency, discipline.

Most people rely on short, intense bursts of inspiration and motivation in their attempts to be successful.

Let us take for example, you reading this book. After you finish and put this book down; you work tirelessly, day and night. You embark on a journey of self-love. You cut away all the negative energies from your life. You start going to the gym six days in a row for two weeks, you make so many changes... and then give up a couple weeks later.

Enthusiasm is common. Endurance is rare.

Success is about discipline. It is about soldiering on even when the motivation is low.

## **6. Success Means Choosing Education Over Entertainment.**

*“Your level of success will rarely exceed your level of personal development, because success is something you attract by the person you become.”*

*- Hal Elrod, **The Miracle Morning***

This is surely a principle I wish I had been endowed with even way long before the end of my teens. I wish I had the discipline to know that entertainment would outlast my education. That I would find all the things I was too busy doing when all that was required of me was to attain some knowledge. Somehow, I had been told all of this, but I guess we are so stubborn as teens, we would want to see it for ourselves.

Moore says that, achieving your ultimate life requires a tremendous deal of learning. It requires an intense dedication to gaining knowledge, learning important lessons, and receiving teachings that add to your wisdom, experience, and education.

I already told you that education is not overrated!

The most successful people of the world don't spend their precious and most potent time watching TV, playing video games, or partying till they are absolutely drunk.

The extraordinary people of this world dedicate most of their time and money into investing in themselves. They read books and blogs, they attend conferences, seminars, webinars, and trainings, they collaborate with others, and they work with their mentors.

In life, seek to fill the wide gap between what you know and what you don't. If you want to find your purpose, and actually start creating and doing work that impacts the lives of thousands, you will need to get educated.

## **7. How You Do Anything is How You Do Everything**

We are back to discipline, honey!

Some people believe that they can be lazy students and expect to excel at their true passions. That never works. I definitely believed in this as a teen. I thought I could be lazy at studying but be able to excel in my passions.

Moore says that, how you do one thing is how you do everything. If you spend all day being bored, lazy, and irresponsible, you can't simply "flip a switch" and become a truly responsible, disciplined, hard worker while at home, in your relationships, your finances, or your health.

My last two years of university were simply busy. I was juggling being a fulltime student, owning a Hair and Beauty Salon and organising events on the week. I would wake up and go to class, rush to the salon right after class, have my meals and plan my events during the evening. I did wedding make up during the day on weekend, hosted my events during the evening and mix in choir practice and church on Sunday. That was my full week.

I would say I had no social life, but my life was my social life. At this point I would advise you to not juggle your education with ANYTHING – that is not the point I am emphasising here. I

worked hard in class, in the salon and when organising events. My discipline was not only in one thing. It showed in all that I did. Sometimes I wonder what would have been the result if I had put all that dedication into just my education at the time.

Most people think they can compartmentalise their discipline and effort - working hard in some areas but not in others.

When one area of your life is suffering, all the other parts suffer. Conversely, when you develop one part of your life, all the other parts benefit too.

How hard I work when I am writing a book is the same effort I put in when I am on set, producing a TV Show/Advert and I take the same effort to the gym when I feel like lifting some weights. Discipline.

## **8. Acting “As If” Becomes Acting “As Is.”**

*Henry Ford* said, “*Whether you think you can or you can’t, you’re right.*”

What you focus on, expands. If all you focus on is how much of a victim you are, you’ll always be a victim. If all you can see is how unfair your circumstances are, you’ll be doomed to stay in your stagnation. But if you see yourself as a victor, a winner, you will always come out on top!

Moore says, winners become winners by acting like winners.

Acting “as if” can be a playful game, where you toy with the balance of shedding off who you were or are, and instead, don the costume of who you want to be. It may sound silly, but this is a powerful exercise for your mind.

If you want to be rich, you cannot partake in habits that keep people poor. If you're a healthy, fit individual, you do not eat garbage. Acting "as if" will eventually become acting "as is." This is how you become truly successful, especially if you or no one else around you has ever done so - you imagine yourself as that person. Then you act accordingly.

And in the words of Paulo Coelho:

*"When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it."*

Moore says, that if you're broke, overweight, unhappy, or stuck, act as if you're not. Act as if you're a rich, fit, content individual with a purpose.

You'll become that person.

*"One will never get more than he thinks he can get."* -Bruce Lee

Mastering success is not an easy task, but it is simple.

## **"The Success How To"**

### ***10 Things I Learnt from Dr. Naomi Ngwira***

In my last year of university, we had our Economics Symposium for Chancellor College Economics Class of 2016, where Dr. Naomi Ngwira, Economist, Entrepreneur, Billionaire (MWK) and The Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of Malawi as of 2016, was the Guest of honour. Coincidentally, this was the day I broke up with my second and last boyfriend – yet another new beginning for me. By now, you should know I am a hopeless romantic –



literally and as such I was feeling a new type of low then, slowly giving up on love and was looking for something more... something to give life a little more meaning. I ended up being absolutely captivated by Dr. Naomi's speech on ***"5 Things about Success."*** I believe these things really influenced me as an entrepreneur and a career woman and were probably perfectly suited for me; now, I am no longer teen, so I am ready to embark on a new life.

She spoke on success and ambition, and a few things caught my attention. Of significance to me were:

**1. Be ambitious.**

To achieve success, you must have ambition.

*"A dream without a plan is just a wish."*

***– Antoine de Saint***

As she started making her speech, she asked a very simple but insightful question:

*"How many of you have a five year plan for our lives, where you want to be in the next five years?"*

Almost all of us in the symposium raised our hands up.

In all you do, make sure you do not have an ambition gap. Do not have standard goals. Study your environment and extend your dreams and goals out of your scope. Challenge yourself.

She dissected ambition into four scopes, namely:

***Career, Financial, Social and Spiritual.***

She asked again,

*“How many of you have plans in all these aspects your lives?”*

I knew I did. However, I was not confident enough to raise my hand as no one raised their hand.

## **2. Get a good job.**

A good job, by her definition, is:

*“One that you love doing and one that allows you to explore your interests and passions.”*

She told us to thoroughly consider the option of self-employment.

At a maximum, try to work for someone for 3-5 years and discover your passion and what you are good at. Then, the next five years should be spent investing in that passion, be it financially or training-wise. Acquire all the training and studying necessary for you to live out that dream.

In a space of 10 years from the time you graduate, you should be set and equipped enough to be self-employed and pursuing your passions.

## **3. Poverty is a choice – ‘Wasauka wafuna’.**

THE 10 YEAR MILLIONARE US\$ (BILLIONARE MWK) CHALLENGE

It may seem like a complicated thing to become a billionaire, but it is not.

Four principles: Patience, Planning, Work, and Consistency.

Start with, say, MK100, 000, double this every quarter until you reach 1 Billion in 10 years. In a space of 16 months, you should be worth MK1.6 million. However, she noted that, after this stage, it becomes harder to double larger amounts in the same short space of time. However, accommodate your growth so much so that in five years, your money has doubled to MK100 million. Then for the coming five years; double it every year and by year 10, you should be worth 1-1.5 Billion.

Practice the art of financial discipline and appreciate the principle of delayed gratification.

#### **4. Your youth will not last forever**

*And I quote, "Life does not begin at 40. Don't let anyone lie to you. At 40, you have started getting sick. You are no longer as physically capable as you once were. Enjoy your youth, be successful while you are young and enjoy life. Don't wait till you are older".*

#### **5. Be assertive**

*"Pursue excellence. Be prepared to be the best".*

Pay close attention to your surroundings. Much can be achieved from training and mentoring, but be observant as well. You need to be recognised more than anything. You could have brainpower and everything else in the world, but if no one knows you, no one will recommend and promote you.

Show your competence. Show your ability to work with a team. Prove that you can deliver. Chase your dreams and do not die dreaming. Do what it takes to achieve them.

## 6. Stick with people who matter.

*“It is partly about what you know,  
But more importantly about who you know.”*

– **Gift Kaputolo** (Economist,

*The University of Malawi*

*Economics Symposium, Class of 2016)*

After you have attained the much needed education, found your passion and drive, it would not pay to be assertive to the wrong people. You must associate with the right crowds.

*“If you don’t know where you are going,*

*Any road will take you there”*

▪ **Lewis Carroll** (*Author of Alice in Wonderland*)

Find the people who love doing what you would love to be doing, who chase dreams similar to yours. Disassociate yourself with people that seem to be on roads that are taking them nowhere. It pays to know the right people.

Stay away from people with toxic lifestyles. There is nothing beneficial about aimless drinking and gossiping. Stay away from what does not build you.

## 7. Marriage has the ability to mould you or break you.

Describe the partner you would love to have in life. Write it down and be patient in your quest to meet someone. Do not easily get excited by humans, as most of us have facades.

Beauty fades – find something that will last. Be sober about who you marry. There is literally no reason to rush into an unhealthy marriage.

Discuss real issues with your partner. Discuss all aspects of life; be it financial, family, spiritual, and work. Be clear about what you want to become and discuss how you can help each other achieve that.

Be clear about expectations and what you have no intentions of compromising your values on.

### **8. No man is an island**

Be a good neighbour to everyone around you. Be the first person to initiate interaction. If you have moved into a new neighbourhood, bake a cake and go over say hello to your neighbours.

Your relatives and in laws are your assets. Keep close the best ones. Keep good relations with those around you.

Being antisocial comes at a cost.

### **9. Have a positive attitude towards life**

Not everything in life has to be an investment. At times just be good, and God will reward you. It is not always about what someone or something can and will do for you. At times, think of what you can do for someone or to better a certain situation.

Remember, every problem has an expiry date; even if that is your dying day. Nothing will last forever, so do not waste the present

worrying away your life when you have so much difference to make in this world.

Be grateful for the little that you have, for someone wishes they could have that little. Even in sickness, there is someone in bigger pain than you are now. Be gracious, God has been good.

Explore in life; read a lot; pursue wisdom and understanding.

### **10. Choose a successful lifestyle.**

*“Where you are is a result of who you were, but where you end up depends entirely on who you choose to be from this moment forward.”*

- ***Hal Elrod***

Lifestyle is one of the most important yet forgotten aspects of success. Success must be cross-sectional. You must be successful in all you do. This includes: health, fitness, mentality, the food you eat, and your spiritual life.

It is the little details about us that make us who we are. Learn all the healthy lifestyle principles and adopt them. Things as simple as ‘drink two litres of water every day’ or ‘eat your fruits and greens’ or ‘work out once a week’ prove to be beneficial in the long-run.

Be spiritually connected. Commit your plans to God and he will make you prosper. There exists a spiritual dimension in everything that you do.

Choose moral uprightness every time. Resist evil. Hold on to your integrity. Be careful with your life choices especially between the ages 20 and 30 as these are defining moments in your life.

*‘Life is interesting.*

*You can make it good,*

*And you can make it bad.*

*The ball is in your court’.*

**– Dr. Mazalera (Economist, Lecturer)**

**Benjamin P. Hardy** discusses some things people do not tell you about success.

## **1. Every Aspect Of Your Life Affects Every Aspect Of Your Life**

Think of it like a circle. Hardy argues that human beings are holistic, meaning that when you change a part of any system, you simultaneously change the whole. He says that you cannot change a part without fundamentally changing everything.

When one area of your life is out of alignment, every area of your life suffers. This is similar to the concept of discipline in your work ethics discussed earlier; that is, you can't compartmentalise a working system because eventually and always, the essentials you procrastinate or avoid, will catch up to your detriment.

You are a holistic systems.

## **2. Competition Is The Enemy**

Instead of trying to compete with other people or businesses, it's better to do something completely different and unique to you. In

other words, as *India Arie puts it*, “*If you create the game, then you create the rules*”.

Once you’ve established yourself as an authority over something, you can set your own terms, rather than reactively responding to your competition. Thus, you want to monopolise the space in which you create value.

If you are constantly competing with others, you will spend every day of your life pursuing goals that aren’t really your own, but what everyone around you deems important. You could spend your whole life trying to keep up, but will probably have a shallow life. You can define success for yourself based on your own values and detach yourself from the noise. You need to define your success independent of everyone’s thought.

### **3. Never Forget Where You Came From**

I make it a point to remain disciplined and humble in all that I do. This will be most essential when you start making enough money and you can buy your way out of things. You start to think you can pay for everything and everyone you need.

Hardy says, it is easy when you achieve any level of success to believe you are solely responsible for that success. It’s easy to forget where you came from. It’s easy to forget all the sacrifices other people have made to get you where you are. It is easy to see yourself as superior to other people.

Humility, gratitude, and recognition of your blessings keep your success in proper perspective. You couldn’t do what you’ve done



without the help of countless other people. You are extremely lucky to be able to contribute in the way you have.

#### **4. If You Need Permission To Do Something, You Probably Shouldn't Do It**

No one is going to give you permission to live your dreams.

*“Stop looking for angels, and start looking for angles.”*

- **Ryan Holiday**

Rather than hoping for something external to change your circumstances, mentally, reframe yourself and your circumstances.

*“When you change the way you see things, the things you see change.”*

- **Wayne Dyer**

Hardy says that you are enough. You can do whatever you decide to do. You can become who you want to be. It is entirely up to you. Make your decisions and forget what everyone else says or thinks about it.

#### **5. Your Vision Of Who You Want To Be Is Your Greatest Asset**

I have always dreamt real big. I always believed I could be and do greater. I have no idea what always gave me the faith but I lived in a world of endless possibilities.

I remember when I was in form 4 and I drew my dream house (much smaller than my dream house now). It was a two storey house that had about four bedrooms. May come as a surprise to you but I actually got bullied for dreaming that big. I was bullied

because for where I am from, that was dreaming too big – and I quote one of my peers “Who do you think you are?”

*“Create the highest, grandest vision possible for your life, because you become what you believe.”*

- **Oprah Winfrey**

No matter where you are right now, you can have any future you want. Mental creation always precedes physical creation. The blueprint you design in your head becomes the life you build.

Hardy tells you to not let society tell you how your house should look. You are an artist and a creator. Your life can be exactly how you want it, whether or not it’s considered a “mansion” by others.

## **6. Don’t Seek Praise. Seek Criticism.**

We are all human and have the major weakness of wanting to be praised. We want the ‘ooh’s and the ‘aaaah’s. If we lack the discipline that must go with success, we will chase any and everything for a little praise. I have been there.

As a culture, we’ve become so fragile that we must combine honest feedback with 20 compliments. I was talking to a friend that I was wondering why it is that most people grow to prefer only comforting lie over uncomfortable truths. Our generation has taken the need for affirmation to a whole new level. I remember being 16 and posting a selfie every day and coming back to check if I got at least 30 likes. You can imagine my joy when I got to 70 likes, never mind 100 - 500 likes later and you really get things in perspective. It is not about doing things that others approve of. It

is about being good at what you are passionate about. That way, you are always chasing criticism to get better and not the praise.

Hardy says that when we get feedback, we do our best to disprove it. Psychologists call this confirmation bias - the tendency to search for, interpret, favour, and recall information that confirms our own beliefs, while giving excessively less consideration to alternative possibilities.

It's easy to get praise when you ask family and friends who will tell you exactly what you want to hear. The irony of praise is, it only goes to your head; it does not make you better. Thus, instead of seeking praise, your work will improve only if you seek criticism.

Always come with the approach "How could this be better?" rather than "How awesome is my creation?!"

## **7. Five Minutes Is A Lot Of Time**

I definitely wish I had spent my time way more wisely in my teens.

One of my good friends is one of the most disciplined people I know. He follows the exact same routine from the moment he wakes up to the moment he gets to work and starts his day every single day. That routine normally includes some meditation, some reading and being ahead of time in getting to work.

How we spend each five minutes of our lives is a determining factor to what we achieve in our lives. Every little bit adds up.

## **8. One Dollar Is A Lot Of Money**

As the saying goes,

“Time is Money” and similarly here, as every minute of your life counts, so does the money.

Hardy says that understanding the value of one dollar is the same as coming to appreciate the value of time. To thoughtlessly spend one dollar may not seem like a big deal, but it actually is. That frivolous spending compounded over a long enough time could be millions. It also reflects a lack of care about the details, which is where the true art and value lies.

## **9. The Music You Listen To Determines Your Success In Life**

I LOVE music! I listen to it all the time. As Friedrich Nietzsche says, “*Without music, life would be a mistake.*”

Research shows how different types of music affect us differently. One study found that if you listen to sad music, you’re more likely to interpret people being sad. By listening to positive music, you’re more likely to see happy faces which will influence how you interact with people.

Listening to moderate noise level makes our mental processing slightly more difficult, which leads us to utilise more creative methods of problem solving. When that music is ambient, we can delve deeper into the wellsprings of neural creativity.

Another research has revealed that your music preference reflects your personality type. For example, they found that classical music fans tend to have high self-esteem, are creative, introvert and at ease; and that chart pop fans tend to have high self-esteem, are

hardworking, outgoing and gentle, but are not creative and not at ease.

Hardy also says that research has found that the types of music we listen to impact our level of spirituality. If you believe in spirituality, it influences everything you do, from how you interact with your family, what you do, to how I develop and pursue my goals.

## 10. Focus Is Today's I.Q.

*“Almost everything in life is a distraction”*

We live in the most distracted era of human history. We live in the age where smartphone and the internet are readily available to most people. It seems that it will take us a minute to be able to balance having access to pretty much everything and being able to focus on one thing at a time. The internet can be used for good or bad depending on who is using it.

One of the biggest challenges to constant distraction is that it leads to “shallow” rather than “deep” thinking, and shallow thinking leads to shallow living.

*“To be everywhere is to be nowhere.”*

- ***Seneca, Roman philosopher***

Sadly, most of us are simply not responsible enough for the use of internet. We waste hours every day staring idly at a screen on our phones and computers. Our attention spans have shrunk to almost

nothing. We've developed some really bad habits that often require extreme interventions to reverse.

Cal Newport (in his book) differentiates “deep work,” from “shallow work.” Deep work is using your skills to create something of value. It takes thought, energy, time and concentration. Shallow work is all the little administrative and logistical stuff: email, meetings, calls, expense reports, etc. Most people aren't moving toward their goals because they prioritise shallow work.

By the end of your teens I want you to have learnt to balance having access to everything and still choosing to focus on one thing at a time.

*“We need to place our egos in our pockets  
And allow others to shine  
And take pride in what they have accomplished.  
After all, when they do  
They are actually extending our influence  
Often beyond what we can imagine.”*

**- James R. Rickabaugh, Ph.D.**

## Chapter 20. INDEPENDENCE AND BALANCE

*“Just do it.”*

- **Nike**

*“Don’t think. You already know what you have to do, and you know how to do it. What’s stopping you?”*

- **Tim Grover**

### **Definition**

#### ***Independence***

*Free from outside control; not subject to another's authority.*

Now that you have come this far in this book – I hate to break it to you, but you are an adult. You are a fully functional grown human being. Grown human beings are expected to take control over their lives and one of the most important ways to do that is to gain independence and live a well-balanced life.

I have wanted to be independent and successful, in that order, for as long as I can remember. I always did things by myself and rarely ever sought approval in my childhood. I had so many hobbies where I truly believe that I functioned as a healthy individual. Sometimes I get shocked at where the shift occurred because in my teens I felt like I certainly needed everybody’s approval to do something as simple as lifting my foot.

Being more independent will give you the freedom to do what you want without caring what others think and it will also lead you to

find some original personal solutions to your problems. Studies show that the more independent one is, the happier he/she feels.

There are different types of independences that I have come across which include intellectual independence, emotional independence and financial independence. These independences are independent of each other but normally work together.

It is no secret that as humans we almost naturally seek to control others. In my teens, my desire to control other humans came from trying to satisfy my own insecurities and make other people worship me. I basically wanted to own other people. I used the common means of emotional and financial manipulation to control and manipulate these people.

Eventually, I started to address my own psychological issues but started noticing that I was not unique in my manipulation. I noticed that there was so much manipulation going on around me and it was being aware of it that made me get above it. So this chapter discusses your independence from other people's influences, but at the same time releasing other people from latches you might have on them because of your own needs. As you read, do not only think of what or who might be controlling you, but also who and what you might be controlling. Freedom is not only about you. You must be set free, but at the same time, you must also set other people free.

First, to be independent, one must first learn to think independently. By the end of your teens, make sure you learn how to use and utilise WikiHow. If you want to waste your time on the



internet, waste it on the right things. It is a very efficient resource search engine.

***Renu Paswan*** in her book “**Live to inspire**”, and as was adapted by Wikihow, discussed a lot of steps on how to keep yourself passionate, inspire and to think independently. This far, it would be questionable if most of these points hadn't already been covered in the book under other chapters. However, to drive the point home, I will briefly repeat them with regards to independence. We are now making reference to living an independent, well-balanced life.

I broke down their analysis into two segments: first Independence; second, balance.

### **Independence**

**Accept yourself.** Accept your body, your personality, your opinions, your choices, your preferences, and your life story. Do not say things against yourself. Put behind your mistakes and learn from them. Make an effort to be a better you and most importantly, love yourself.

**Believe in yourself.** We are all different and have something unique to say. No one can speak the words on your lips, and not everyone is going to agree with what you say which is why it's important for you to stand by who you are. Believing in yourself will make you trust your own decisions - even if they completely go against someone else's or even society's expectations.

If you don't have faith in yourself, you will always second guess yourself and turn to others for help every time you have to make a decision.

**Accept the world.** Independent people are those who see the world, with its good and its bad, and consciously choose to be strong for themselves and others. You are not independent because you do not trust anyone. You are not independent because you think highly of yourself.

Accepting the world and all of its complications will also help you to see that there are an infinite number of ways to live out there and nobody is forcing you to conform to one of them.

**Be emotionally independent.** Chances are, you, as a teenager, much like me, depend on many people for emotional support. This is normally your parents, a boy or girl friend, or good close friends. Although it is possible to continue to depend on these people for the rest of your life, it is in your best interest to realise that everyone in your life that you depend on will one day no longer be around.

It's okay to get attached to a few key people in your life, but you should not let these people determine your level of happiness. That's up to you.

**Stop caring about what other people think.** This is the most important thing about being independent. If you depend on others to tell you if your music is cool, or if your outfit is cute, you won't be very happy! As long as you like it - nothing else matters! Stop worrying about other people's judgments about your life, whether

they are thinking about your clothes, your choice of career, or your choice of significant other. These are your decisions, and not anyone else's.

If you always have the nagging thought, "But what will other people think if..." in the back of your head, then you'll always be holding yourself back from doing your own thing.

**Get your own information.** Always have a goal of getting both sides of every story before forming an opinion. You can talk to people of a variety of backgrounds to get more information on a relevant topic too, but never let other people tell you what to think. Make a goal of reading as much as possible, whether you're reading literature or just a newspaper. Being well-informed will keep you from being a follower and will lead to more independent thought.

**Become financially independent.** It is tempting to depend on others financially, but before you experience independence, you must be independent. Secure your finances. True independent living relies on financial freedom. Pay your own bills. If you don't have the money for these expenses, save aggressively.

**Leave your friends and family at home when you can.** This is a difficult step on the journey to independent living, but you must start doing things on your own. You do not need to drive with someone to the restaurant, because you can meet them there. Go shopping alone, spend at least one or two evenings a week by yourself. Work on activities that force you to lead, not follow.

If you're used to always having a buddy when you go hiking or go to the mall, see how it feels to rough it on your own.

**Plan your day around *you*.** People who are most dependent on others allow their worlds to revolve around the needs of other people or other things. Plan your day according to your own schedule - make a list of what you want to do, what you need to do and what you should have already done. If a friend really needs a favour, that is all right, but don't let that friend dominate the plan you had made so carefully.

Treat your alone time like it's a date with your ideal crush. That is, guard it carefully and don't let anyone stop you from spending time with yourself.

**Avoid trends.** Dress how you want to dress, and say what you want to say. If you like to act crazy, by all means go for it! A good thing to remember is that good taste and style does not have to cost money - it is something that is innate or learnt but can make good of anything with a little know-how.

**Spend time with people with different worldviews.**

Hanging out with people who are just like you won't inspire you to be any more independent. Making an effort to be friends with a variety of people who all have different perspectives and occupations can give you more sense of what's out there and to see that there's no one way to do it right.

Hang out with a lawyer, a chef, a security guard and so on for a change. This can make you more open-minded and more willing to do something completely new on your own.

### **Learn to drive or navigate public transportation**

I have met people that are in their mid-twenties who never learnt how to drive. It would make some sense if they never had access to a car, but some ‘just never needed to’. I know some individuals who proudly claim not to be able to use google maps application. That is one thing you want to have mastered by the end of your teens.

In life, do not wait until you need to learn how to do something for you to feel the need to learn. Skillsets are essential and make it a point to learn as much, as often as you can.

You'll never be fully independent if you don't learn to drive or how to get around on your own. If you are old enough to drive, how can you call yourself independent if you always depend on your boyfriend, best friend, or parents to drive you around? Take life by the horns and get a driver's license, and then work up to having your own car – but we can reserve that for the end of your twenties.

Depending on other people to get around will make you more likely to stay home or to wait around for other people to determine your fate. You should be able to do whatever you want to do -- whenever you want.

### **Do your own research**

It's great to have people to turn to, but the next time you pick up your phone, ask yourself, can I figure out this information on my own? The answer will most likely be yes. Sure, it will take longer, but think about how much more rewarding it will feel.

### **Learn to be handy around the house**

Learn to be more handy by watching useful videos, reading wikiHow, or reading Popular Mechanics. If you have a good friend who is a carpenter, ask for some carpentry lessons. Learning how to fix up your own space will make you save lots of money and feel like you don't have to wait around for others to make your life better.

Learning how to quickly do anything is much better than waiting for somebody else to get to it.

### **Cook for yourself**

Have you seen those boys online that post about being able to cook like they deserve a medal? It is because, in their whole lives, they were denied the basic principle of taking care of and feeding themselves.

Understand the basics of cooking: how to sauté basic foods, how to use your oven, and how to cook simple dishes like pasta, potatoes, and salad. Knowing that you can go to the supermarket or farmer's market, pick up a few key ingredients, and whip together a delicious meal will make you feel like you are capable of doing anything on your own. If you become a great cook, you can even invite other people over to enjoy the benefits of your skills.

Not only will learning to cook for yourself make you more independent, but it will help you save lots of money, which is another key to your independence.

### **Get used to doing things alone**

If you're truly independent, then you won't need a buddy to accomplish every little task or to do any fun activity. Don't wait around for a friend to be available to try that new restaurant in your town or to see that new movie at the theatre. Treat yourself and go alone. If you head to the movies, you'll be impressed by how many other people are enjoying a good film solo, too.

I remember when I had a 22 hour layover in Dubai all by myself. If I had never learnt to live by myself, that could possibly have been the worst day of my life. However, I got on the metro, went into town and met a French guy whom I ended up exploring the city with when we could barely hear a word the other could say. We managed to be alone together.

One of the most important things I appreciate to have learnt is how to declutter – living a mess-free, clutter-free life.

I once had a friend who marvelled in being too busy, having a lot to do by the end of the day. He showed me the endless string of un-responded messages on his Instant Messaging apps. All I heard was that he was a bad planner, he had terrible time management and was inefficient at executing – CLUTTER, CLUTTER, CLUTTER!

Life is about finding your balance.

## **Balance**

### **Be self-motivated**

Other people do not have and will never have the same vested interest in your success. Motivation and success is a function of habit. Break your bad habit of procrastination, and replace it with one of good planning. The most successful people in the world aren't always the brightest, or the best looking, but no matter what other talents or gifts they have been blessed with, they have been underpinning their self-esteem a series of victories over tasks both large and small.

If you want to achieve a career goal, it should be to please yourself, not to please anyone else.

Don't do anything just to impress others. Do it because you want to drive yourself to succeed. Do it for yourself.

### **Be your own hero**

A role model can help inspire you and show you how to live your life. It's not a bad thing to find someone you deeply admire and shares your values. However, it's important to think of yourself as your own role model, as a person who is capable of doing and saying anything he or she wants. Aim to be yourself, and be the best you can be. If you can't look up to yourself, you can't be independent.



Avoid idolising any friends or acquaintances in your social circle. This will only make you even more likely to forget about doing your own thing.

### **Accept that life is not fair**

Chapter 1 of this book discusses how our parents cared for us so much that they did everything in their power to raise us in a fair and just environment. The real world is so different which becomes a big problem for most. The rules in the world usually protect either the majority (which you may not be a part of) or people with money and power. You will be treated badly for all sorts of unfair things: your skin colour, your intelligence, your height, your weight, how much money you have, your opinions, your gender, and just about everything else that makes you who you are.

Don't let the unfairness of the world keep you from doing what you want to do. Don't convince yourself that it's just not possible in the world you live in today.

### **Don't just *think* that you're the best; prove it to yourself!**

Your opinion matters the most in your own motivation.

It's far easier to just start dealing with your responsibilities, knowing, with an incredibly strong faith in yourself, that you can handle what comes up because you have before, than trying to accomplish goals because you're all warm and fuzzy inside.

### **Maintain solid friendships**

You don't have to throw away your friends to be independent. In fact, your independence is reinforced with good friends. When your friend needs someone to talk to, be there for them. Be trustworthy. Do not gossip or tell anyone about your friends' secrets or personal matters even if they didn't say anything about it. Be a strong person for your friends and loved ones. It does not only show that you're selfless, but pretty soon you'll learn how to deal with any situation that comes your way because of your friends' experiences.

### **Don't settle for anything, for comfort, for ease, or to "be nice"**

Work hard at everything you do. Defend your opinions. Don't let a man/woman feel s/he has to pamper you. If you're capable of doing something good, do it. That doesn't mean you should do absolutely everything, but you shouldn't feel it is necessary for people to do things for you that you could do for yourself.

### **Dump the bad influences in your life**

Learn to keep a healthy distance from your friends. Some people make you shine, while others will stunt your growth and draw all your energy. Avoid any friends who really like building a following and having people worship them. Friendship is a two way street. Do not be around people that consider themselves "queen bees".

### **Save money**

Save as much as reasonably possible. This will help you create an emergency fund, since life can be unpredictable at times. You don't

plan accidents. There are such things as accidents, health problems, or even natural disasters, which can occur when you least expect it.

### **Sign up for a bank account**

Most banks offer a checking and savings account together, in one convenient package. Even if you feel you do not make enough money to need a bank account, open one anyway. Money you earn, that isn't necessary for your own expenses, should be put into a savings account until you're ready to be independent.

Having your own bank account will keep you from depending on others for money, and will help you stay away from reckless spending.

### **Thank people for helping you**

There's nothing wrong in admitting that you do need help sometimes and it won't make you any less independent to acknowledge the times when you need help.

### **Take it slowly**

Stick to your own pace and only do what you want to when you want. Take this book's advice when you want to; after all, that is the essence of the message here. If you don't want to do something, don't do it. You can be independent, but only if you want to be.

Having coming this far, I truly believe you have everything I wish I knew when I was a teenager. Now, the only question that remains, is how to make yourself unstoppable. *Benjamin P. Hardy* says

that a lot of people are good at what they do but only a *select few* are completely unstoppable.

Those who are unstoppable are in their own world. They don't compete with anyone but themselves. You never know what they will do - you will only be forced to respond. Even though they don't compete with you, they make you compete with them.

*“Every right decision I have ever made has come from my gut. Every wrong decision I've made was the result of me not listening to the greater voice of myself.”*

- ***Oprah Winfrey***

So how do you become unstoppable? Benjamin P hardy outlines 30 steps on how you can do this. If you are truly purpose driven, by the end of your teens, make sure you explore some of his writing.

- 1. Don't think—know and act.*
- 2. Always be prepared so you have the freedom to act on instinct.*
- 3. Don't be motivated by money or anything external.*
- 4. Never be satisfied.*
- 5. Always be in control.*
- 6. Be true to yourself.*
- 7. Never let off the pressure.*
- 8. Don't be afraid of the consequences of failure.*
- 9. Don't compete with others. Make them compete with you.*

10. *Never stop learning.*
11. *Success isn't enough—it only increases the pressure.*
12. *Don't get crushed by success.*
13. *Completely own it when you screw up.*
14. *Let your work speak for itself.*
15. *Always work on your mental strength.*
16. *Confidence is your greatest asset.*
17. *Surround yourself with people who remind you of the future, not the past.*
18. *Let things go, but never forget.*
19. *Have clear goals.*
20. *Respond immediately, rather than analysing or stalling.*
21. *Choose simplicity over complication.*
22. *Never be jealous or envious of someone else's accomplishments.*
23. *Take the shot every time.*
24. *Don't get caught up in the results of your success. Always remain focused on what got you those results: the work.*
25. *Think and act 10X.*
26. *Set goals that far exceed your current capabilities.*
27. *Make time for recovery and rejuvenation.*
28. *Start before you're ready.*
29. *If you need permission, you probably shouldn't do it.*

*30. Don't make exceptions.*

Ask yourself, are you unstoppable? If you are not, what are you waiting for?

By the end of your teens, make sure you live a clutter free well-balanced life! Make sure you are in tune with all the previous 19 chapters of this book, the previous 19 years of your life.

Please make it certain that your time-management skills are excellent and that you utilise every God-given minute on this earth.

Know the difference between Busyness vs Efficiency. You ought to be efficient, not always busy.

Success is not a one-time process. You do not do it once. It requires self-discipline. You do it over and over again until you're successful. Then you repeat the process to remain successful.

Make sure your professional life is on point. Keep your commitments and meet your deadlines. Do not make promises you cannot keep, and make sure you are able to perform. Always stay on schedule for whatever you say you will do.

Emotional health is important. A life controlled by emotions is inefficient. Make sure you are fully aware of your emotions, and that you allow yourself to feel them without letting them control you.

Self-discipline is essential if we are going to get things done. Most people take the "I'm gonna wait until I feel like it, to do it". I say take the "I'm gonna do it so I feel like it" approach.

By The End of Your Teens, I want you to take responsibility for your life. This is your life, no one else's. Nobody is responsible for your happiness, only you. No one is accountable for your self-care. In any broken relationship remember you are a part of the problem. In any bad situation remember you can do better. Stop living this life like you will get a second chance, like you will get a "take 2". Do not live this life hoping other people will do better so you can live a better life.

This is it, one shot and you have to make the best of it. Read, acquire knowledge. I cannot emphasise the importance of reading enough. Assess and question. Walk away from toxicity – be it in friendship, relationships or even family. Mend important broken relationships. Do your best every single time. Forgive yourself for not knowing better. Do better when you know better. Make it a point not to repeat mistakes. Have no regrets. Live

*"Forgive yourself*

*For not knowing*

*What you didn't know*

*Before you learnt it."*

*"Do the best you can*

*Until you know better.*

*And when you know better,*

*Do better"*

- **Maya Angelou**

And here you are at the end of your teens, equipped with knowledge. You have dreams, you have focus, and you have ambition. You still have so much to learn. All the knowledge is at your disposal and do not be scared to take it all in. You are young, the world is yours. Here are my mistakes. Do better than I did.

Oh darling, I wish you luck!

All My Love,

Nthanda