

FROM THE SWEET SUCCESS SERIES



SWEET SUCCESS

DAVID K. SWEET, PH.D.

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SUCCESS**

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Wealth does not bring about *arête* (excellence).
Arête brings about wealth...and all other public
and private blessings for humans.

—Socrates, *Apology*

Let us carefully observe those good qualities wherein
our enemies excel us and endeavor to excel them,
by avoiding what is faulty, and imitating
what is excellent in them.

—Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question...
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

—T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

This is going to be #epic!

—Simon Jelfs

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#SWEET SUCCESS

So there I am, in my thirties, overweight, out of shape, poor, and needing to reinvent myself. I started to run. Growing up, I had done very little sports. In grade school, I hated judo because they kept throwing me to the ground and messing up my *dogi*. Baseball and soccer both frightened me as I feared the ball. I did a bit of Tae Kwon Do and in high school was interested in cross-country cycling until my bike was stolen. I was a nerd who found refuge in books and writing.

In 1998, I moved to Tokyo with my family and, to feed them, started out in sales, which I greatly enjoyed. Our company felt that being healthy promoted better sales, so I started running. After all, it gave me a chance to be alone a bit—we lived in a very small Japanese apartment. I also felt running was inherently a mental exercise; all I needed to do to run a marathon was create a program, follow it daily, and have the fortitude and persistence to complete the program. In short, I needed to train regularly more than anyone else. I found the process challenging, yet enjoyable. After my first marathon, I was hooked. I started to run all the time and loved marathons and then ultra-marathons. I became a self-proclaimed runaholic.

Sweet Success is similar in construction. I wanted a way to grow, learn, and develop both personally and professionally. I've never really thought about "work-life" balance; I've only considered

everything “life.” After all, when I walk into the office, my life doesn’t cease. When I walk into my home, I still consider parts of my job. It was all part of me and my life.

Sweet Success is put together like a running program to work on the *arête*, excellence, of your physical, mental, and spiritual life. The selections have been blended so that things are mixed up a bit to keep it interesting.

In marathon training, I practice a variety of runs—some long, some short, some fast, some slow. Rather than a boring 10-kilometer run every day, it’s more interesting to have variety—for example, some time at the track, a long 30-kilometer run, and a fast 14K tempo run.

Here too, some of the essays will have different themes, introducing you to new ideas, reinforcing others, and challenging how you currently live your life. Some of the ideas you’ll already do. For example, as a runner I know how to run, but I can improve on my pacing. In this book, you’ll find some nutrition ideas, which you may already know. Great! Other points on idea generation may be new to you. I would challenge you that those will be the ones that will give you more growth and open unknown doors for you.

I’m inviting you to join me in a few inspired ideas that have helped me in life. This is a casual affair with a friend to chat about everything from health to memory, from your childhood to old age. Not as sophisticated as Marcus Aurelius, but hopefully born from the same Stoic vein, and also mixed in with a healthy amount of Walt Whitman.

Here we are, and we can relax as among friends and slip off our shoes. We can sit down to a casual lunch under a tree and chat about life. Let the cool breeze blow over the tops of our feet—you there and me here. If you're lucky, you'll have your feet on soft grass or, even more luscious, wading in a warm pool. Maybe your toes will feel the dirt or sand. I confess that I'm inside with a soft rug under my feet, but it's fuzzy and soft to the touch.

And here, on the page, across time and space, we can exchange our thoughts—barefoot, relaxed, suspending closure and open to new ideas, exploring together what life is about and sharing the best that the universe has to offer.

PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

We will explore performance improvement. I'll share with you some ideas and personal views and stories rather than pedantic absolutes or dogmatic systems. We are searching for a natural, organic approach that fits you rather than a one-size generic answer.

Because the writing is personal in nature, it is also an autobiography of sorts. There are stories of mentors who have given me life lessons and lessons I'm still trying to unravel. Hopefully, you'll find inspiration and a few "ah-has" in the essays and the exercises.

Inspiration is a noun that means "being mentally stimulated to do or feel something." Synonyms for the word are guiding light, creativity, and bright idea. If we follow the etymology of the word, you will find it in Middle English meaning "in the sense." I love that, because when we are out of flow of the world, we are

generally *out* of our senses, versus *into* our senses. We are moving here or there, trying to get something done, moving fast, multi-tasking, reacting, and forgetting our senses.

In contrast, when we are in our sense, we are in ourselves, but not focused on ourselves; we are focused on something outside of us and how it relates to us. To dive into the spiritual and philosophical for a moment, it is *yang* and *yin*, active and receiving from an external force or energy. It is the subject and object and the awareness of the two and the process of the awareness.

As we follow the etymology further back, past the Old French to the Latin, the word changes into a verb, and the much more common history of the word meaning to “breathe into from a divine or supernatural being.” Again, it is an awareness, but not of ourselves, not “self-awareness” but an awareness of the other. In this case, the divine. Our *arête*, that state of potential excellence, is in each of us, and it’s our responsibility in life to release it.

ARÊTE

Arête comes from the Greek, and like many words from that very rich language, defies direct translation. The easiest concept is “excellence,” especially in body and mind. When looking at Homer and the warriors of *The Iliad*, they were striving for *arête* in strength and bravery. In Plato, we find *arête* around the ideas of virtue, rather than strength. In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he follows the Greek idea and summarizes *arête* perfectly:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely,

*whatever is commendable, if there is any **excellence** [arête], if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things* (Philippians 4:8).

At the philosophical heart of this book, if I were to sum it up in one word, would be *arête*. In your own path to success, I want to assist you to live a life of *arête*—to strive for excellence, expect happiness, and accomplish something new and different, like paint or write a better email or run a faster marathon. I want you to find a bit of spice and flavor in your life.

Arête follows a humanist curiosity of what we've done as a human and a belief in what we can still accomplish. We are born an animal, a *homo sapiens*, and each of us needs to progress into being a human—moving from just an animal with opposable thumbs who collects the most sticks in the best cave, or in our modern day collection of money and the creature comforts of home and food and Netflix, into something greater that creates, develops, and helps the human race progress.

Many animal rights people I meet like animals better than people and have greater faith in dolphins or the speech of an orangutan than in that of their neighbor. I'm not here to belittle the animal kingdom; however, at the time of this writing, humans are the smartest, most creative, and most adaptive animals in the universe that I'm aware of. Nothing else on the planet is able to do—for better or worse—what humans can.

In addition, no intelligent alien life has been found. I've not seen a ghost or a being from another dimension. And as smart as I believe a poodle is or as exceptionally intelligent a dolphin or any other animal on this planet may be, I've yet to see anything

but a human compose anything as gorgeous as Mozart's *Figaro* or paint anything as sublime as the Sistine Chapel or write anything as stirring as *War and Peace*.

POTENTIAL

You, however, have that potential. From here on a tiny blue rock in the Milky Way, you are unique like no other. In all the history of this Earth and—as mentioned, as of this writing—of the universe, there has never been and perhaps never again will be *you*. You with your inimitable makeup of experiences, talent, and personality. This makes you valuable to the whole human race. You carry part of our human collective, embodying the best (and, of course sometimes, as world leaders often prove, the worst) of human capabilities.

You have the potential to create, inspire, evolve, and grow beyond our current limited beliefs. I'll say, as Uncle Ben said to Peter Parker, with great power comes great responsibility. What we currently do to live on this planet is often negligent, harmful, disgraceful, and selfish. The mass production, manufacturing, and torturing of cattle and chickens is an abomination. We constantly pollute the oceans and sky and are irresponsibly destroying the forests. I understand the trade-offs and nothing is as easy as it seems. What I believe, however, is that more creative, smarter, engaged people sharing will help the humanist cause, which in turn will help the planet.

To do this, I want our time together to inspire you to create, think, observe, relax, design, and celebrate life so that you can

improve your life and break free from whatever is holding you back. By doing this, you can in turn inspire others to do the same. And together, we can all sit down, relax and chat, and enjoy successful lives.

Some special people have helped me along in this path. First, Francisco Betancourt, who inspired me on this project and continues to inspire. “Inspire” comes from the Latin, meaning to “breathe into,” usually from the divine that imparts truth and ideas to another. That describes Francisco and his invaluable contribution and influence.

Thank you to Ashley Harvey and Benjamin Martin for their valued input, perceptive insights, and kind guidance.

Simon Jelfs is definitely #epic, and I thank him for the editing, comments, and encouragement. Also a huge thanks to Simon for getting me off my butt and into running those many moons ago.

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Last, and definitely the most important, my family. My cherished wife, Tomoko, who constantly supports, encourages, and improves me. I love her dearly. My two sons, Reili and Tetsia, who have grown to be fine men who inspire me to be a better person.

And my parents who have been the best models a person could hope for.

May everyone have such wonderful people to surround themselves with and to share a sweet and successful life.

David Sweet
Tokyo, May 2019

#COMMONPLACE BOOK

A Commonplace Book originates from the categorizing and taking down of notes from what one reads—capturing quotes, images, and ideas. In contrast to a chronological journal or diary, a commonplace book is categorical. John Locke wrote a book on how to keep a commonplace book, and writers like John Milton and Virginia Woolf organized their thoughts into such notebooks. Harvard has photographs of commonplaces in a variety of languages dating back to the 16th century. Sometimes commonplaces will contain quotes, recipes, measurements, formulas, pictures, and other interesting scraps of memorabilia.

Like Aaron Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man*, the word “common” made me feel that such a book would involve the ordinary, easy, and casual jotting down of information. Everyone could devise a commonplace book—an inclusive book that anyone could write and that contains anything and everything. I took the meaning far from just note taking. A commonplace book, I imagined, constructed an entrance ramp to the most democratic of entrances into thought, encompassing the common daily sights, sounds, observations, and impressions of the everyday: ladybugs on a breakfast plate near the toast, the smell of diesel fuel from a bus on a cold winter morning, the sound of snow crunching under feet, the monumental complaints of the day, a shiver from a brisk north wind in November, a complaint about how my coworker

whistles out of tune, the calico cat next door, the green glass jar in the shop window, and a quote by W. Somerset Maugham. Nothing too important, but just little items that captured the attention.

Of course, the commonplace book would also capture the heaviest of world changing ideas, thoughts, plans, lists of creative endeavors, sketches for how to build a deck in the backyard, poems of death and love, lyrics of a song, or fragments of ideas for a letter to a lover.

In contrast to the commonplace, the word “journal” sounds serious and stuffy. We keep a journal the way that one “keeps” a pet, with some haughty connotations formed by published journals like *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Journal of Administrative Science*, or more extensive research-based journals like *The Journal of Investigative Dermatology*. A journal is for something important.

Like a commonplace book, a journal may be a doorway, but it feels less accessible. Perhaps an automatic door where anyone can enter, but engineered with a stairway leading up to the door. Attired in a black turtleneck sweater, opening a Moleskine notebook qualifies for a good journal—preferably unlined, with a few of the pages dog-eared. The observations of the day, sketches perhaps taken from the Tate Gallery, a sonnet or two, and the outline for the latest novel. No pages for hamburger recipes, jokes about hamsters, or Japanese vocabulary learned from the restaurant owner down the street.

Personally, I dreamed of having a commonplace that looked like the notebook carried by Indiana Jones in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*—tattered, worn, with maps, sketches, diagrams, and secrets

written in code. Or da Vinci's notebook with drawings, cartoons, and elaborate observations of dissections, wings of birds, and flowing wind and waves. Maybe even a journal like that of Hendrik van Loon, with beautifully written passages and simple sketches describing George Washington crossing the Delaware with his troops for a surprise attack on that cold Christmas morning of 1776. Of course, there would also be a plethora of delightful aphorisms, deep humanistic insights, philosophical whims, several silly sketches from our office, and many off-color jokes. If drawing a humorous penis was good enough for Leonardo da Vinci, it's good enough for me, by golly.

Then in my dream, after I had long been dead and buried, all my tattered commonplace books would be found by some future collegiate Freudian scholar writing her or his master's thesis, poring ceaselessly over the pages, searching for some deep insights. Or perhaps my progeny would seek insights into their mysterious and quirky grandfather or great uncle, to find how he agonized over money or deeply loved his wife. The gentle secrets of his childhood might be revealed and occasionally, a sentence or two might inspire them. I wanted to fade into history while my commonplace books proudly orate like the replicant, Roy Batty, in *Blade Runner*:

I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die.

Then there are diaries. Lovely little things, diaries. I picture Louisa May Alcott dressed in black lace, sitting at her writing

table with her bonnet to the side as she selects the images from her daily life, the weather and the scone she had for breakfast with a tad of marmalade recorded in the gentle, rounded letters. In a diary, complaints about the cold slip in nicely next to notes about a stranger who visited in his silk hat and calf-skin gloves that he removed and then lovingly caressed his brown, handsome mustache.

Or maybe, a diary could conceal the facts of the day, the implied urges of the writer, which in turn give future Freudians stacks of research to sift through. Or maybe a diary is a bit more whimsical, kept on the bedside where sex and intrigue are recorded. Something Bridget Jones would be proud of.

Personally, I got my first diary when I was seven or eight years of age. It was a red velvet book that snapped shut with a metal button. On the cover was written in gold, “Diary.” Inside, there was a “19__” where the year could be handwritten in, along with the month and day. Then I could write along the gold lined paper with my favorite writing instrument, which at the time was a BIC four-color pen. It housed green, black, blue, and red ink. I fearlessly used all four colors, sometimes in the same entry. The letter shapes are shaky—the early attempts at cursive writing by someone who has just learned how to connect all the letters together.

One day I snuck into Mom’s bedroom, and on her nightstand found her own diary or journal. I opened it. Her words were scribbled in black felt pen. Her letters were round, neat, easy for my elementary school learning to scan. I remember casually glancing over the words only searching for one thing—my name. I ignored the rest. Here and there were references to me and I

could learn about myself, my mother's secret thoughts about me. Then I found something that shocked me. She had been reading my diary. I slammed the book shut. I wanted to confront her; but because I was reading her journal, there was no real way for me to bring it up. It was quite a conundrum, so I kept my secret; and whenever I wrote, guarded my thoughts. I had discovered the importance of having a reading audience, even when we believed we were writing only for ourselves.

Even now, the connotation of diary still holds many secrets.

Now, I sit in my office typing on my Mac. I found a great little app called "Day One," where I can scribble down an entry—my electronic commonplace book that works on my mobile phone and tablet. Though it looks like I'm texting or responding to email, in reality I'm jotting down scenes and thoughts, ideas and dreams. Thirty years ago, I carried a pocket notebook and tiny ballpoint pen the size of a toothpick around with me everywhere. With the joys of technology, it's much easier to jot down ideas anywhere and anytime. With a computer or tablet, I can type or dictate, then cut and paste into a blog, essay, poem, or story.

I had a writing friend who told me that writing on paper is writing with earth and stone (paper and pen) versus writing on the computer, which is writing with light. The nature of the tools allows for different dynamics. Myself, I compose stories with the computer. Poetry and essays, I always do my first draft in pen and paper. There are no hard or fast rules, though, and I change with my interests. I'm in a transition shifting back into using notebooks more and more—going analog.

In primary school I wrote a diary, and then I graduated to a journal. In university, I found Julia Cameron's *Morning Pages*—three pages of longhand. I was religious in writing every morning. I would roll out of bed, regardless of the time or temperature, and write. If I had to take an early plane at 6:30 a.m., I would wake at 4:30 to write. I wanted to record dreams, feel in flow, and experience synchronicity. Then I found Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones*. She described writing like meditation, thoughts flowing on the page. Next, came Stephen King's idea from his excellent book, *On Writing*, where writing is “telepathy, of course.” He explains how a writer in his time and place can connect to the reader in her time and place. Walt Whitman too believed he was connecting with the reader. I too believe the same and am happy to connect with you now. Are you still barefoot?

All these combine for me into a friendly Commonplace Book, or CB for short. A CB is a friendly, casual place to relax, to scribble, journal, record events, meditate, and connect to our future selves. The notebooks are random, messy, and comfortable like an old pair of jeans, a warm sweater, or favorite pajamas. The majority of the words scribbled are messy and often illegible. Once in a while, a good idea shows up, but not generally. It doesn't need to. This is a place to process and relax. Ideas may be lights in the night sky, but there's no need to expect planets or moons. Mainly, it's gibberish, and that's groovy. Just common. Just a commonplace for a common person, just as the stars are common. It is always good to remember that each star is a sun's chance to shine, just as each common word and thought is a unique chance for us to capture and realize our life and share our thoughts. The point, though, is to take those common ideas, and then create a spectacular life with extraordinary works.

#SWEET SUCCESS: Go buy a notebook. Something easy, comfortable. I change mine all the time. Sometimes it's a simple spiral notebook. Other times, I splurge for a fancy cover. I recently bought an expensive Moleskine because it was blue velvet and had a Rolling Stones tongue on it. I like to have something large enough to capture ideas or draw, but small enough that I can carry it if needed. My favorite is a very inexpensive A5 size (210 mm × 297 mm or 8 in. × 11 in.) notebook. Try several and see what works. Keep it simple.

#ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DAVID SWEET is an author, poet, entrepreneur, executive coach, and runaholic. In the Sweet Success series, his books include *Sweet Success*, *Sweet Sales*, and *Recruit!*. His poetry includes *Pop Rocks* and *Split Infinity Forward*. He lives in Tokyo with his wife, sons, fish, and running shoes. He can be contacted at david@barefootlunch.com and found at www.drdaidsweet.com.