**Strategies for Success**

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| Hello everyone, my name is Harsh and I am the wrong person to tell you how to succeed. | **Cover** |
| When you think of successful people, Bill Gates, B.R. Ambedkar, Shahrukh Khan, Beyoncé, Sania Mirza, Sushma Swaraj and such people come to mind.  You’ll have some of their posters in your school and some in your cupboards.  None of you had heard of me till you learnt about me before this session.  Then why has Apurva Ma’am invited me?  I think its because a few years ago I was in school like all of you wondering what to do with my life. Also because she’s not friends with Beyoncé.  Hence I will not be telling you what to what to do, I’m sure you’re bored of hearing that. I’ll rather share some of my experiences since I was your age and what I have learnt | **Successful People** |
| Lets start with the essentials of success that I was told at your age:   1. Beta en chaar saal mehnat kar lo fir zindagi bhar aaram 2. Zindagi mai kuch banna ai to science pad lo 3. Board exams mai number faisla karenge tum baaki zindagi kaise guzaarte   Is this true? Maybe  Is this the advice I’ll give to someone your age? No  I don’t think Bill Gates, Ambedkar, Shahrukh Khan, Beyoncé, Sania Mirza or Sushma Swaraj became very successful because they studied very hard for 4 years, opted for science or scored very high marks in board exams. Surely there must be more to it.  I was a science student in school, with Physics, Chemistry, Maths and Biology. Much to my parent’s embarrassment I chose to do BA Pass in college. My father once sat me down and explained how if I studied Physics I could make more money even taking tuitions than teaching History | **Essentials of Success** |
| Thankfully they ultimately supported my decision when I got into one of Delhi University’s best colleges. In college I was surrounded by people who’d scored very high marks in class XII. I looked down on many of them, wondering how did he or she get through? And was intimidated by many of them, wondering what would they think of me if I said something stupid. But the less I judged or more I talked to people I was scared of judging me, I realised people weren’t that stupid and others weren’t so bad. I came to know many people, some of them are still my closest friends. And that is how I went to Oxford on a full scholarship.  Didn’t make sense? I’ll explain in a bit. | **College**  **Judging**  **Being Judged** |
| There was a pattern to people I looked upto and down upon. Most of the ones I considered above me came from richer, more educated, better travelled and cultured families. Most of the ones I thought I’m better than came from humbler backgrounds. Lot of people were in that college because they had good guidance, supporting environment and role models at home.  A lot had come there through sheer hard work, inspite of parents who fought, discouraging environments and no one to look up to. I later learnt this is called privilege. Privilege is something that benefits you that you haven’t necessarily carved for yourself. Men get more income and opportunities than women, being a man is a privilege. Higher caste people get more opportunities than lower casts, being upper caste is a privilege. Some religions and races are favoured more than others, being a White Christian is a privilege.  In our context only about 25% children in India get to go to private schools. Being in a private school is a privilege. Of the children who enrol in school only about 40% get to attend class 9-12, getting secondary education in a private school in India is a privilege. Further this percentage keeps decreasing as you go to college, do a masters and so on. | **Recognizing Privilege** |
| What did realising my privilege teach me?  Firstly I learnt that everyone comes from a certain background which is not their fault or their achievement. More importantly, I realised not everyone gets the opportunities I’m getting. There’ll always be people who have more than me, but I should realise how many don’t get what I have. I should be grateful and make the most of it. These opportunities are all around us; sports, painting, singing competitions, debates, quizzes, olympiads, even your school library! |  |
| Realising my privilege, I decided to get over my fear of being judged by others and apply for everything I was eligible for. I immediately applied for a scholarship to Japan to which only four people had applied. One was selected and three were put on waiting list. I was third in this waiting list. However it taught me something, I had written an application, sat through an interview, gotten insights by myself on what to do and what not to. |  |
| I next applied for my dream job to be a journalist and I got it, very low paying much to my parents’ disappointment. I hated it. I worked over 16 hrs a day got shouted at all the time and felt both my self esteem and writing style were getting worse. Again to my parents’ disappointment I quit in a few months. By now we both agreed I shouldn’t be a journalist, but for different reasons. More importantly I had learnt by doing not by being told. |  |
| While exploring what to do next a friend told me that if you studied Sociology at Delhi School of Economics, you can work with the UN. The idea seemed very appealing to me and with no background in Sociology I applied for one of the most competitive programs in the country. I didn’t get through the first list, nor the second, nor the third, finally my name showed up on the fourth list. A friend had unwittingly guided me to something that would change the course of my life.  Thereon I was extremely driven to apply for everything, not bother if I got it or not. I applied for a scholarship and was called for the exam. 7 people had bothered to apply for 8 spots. By now I was better at writing an application, giving exams and sitting for an interview. I was shocked more than anybody else when I got the most prestigious scholarship, ahead of university toppers. It wasn’t my skills or intelligence alone, but also a combination of staying inspired and recognizing that everyone doesn’t get this opportunity. By next year I looked for more opportunities, found and applied for an internship with the UN and got it. A year later I saw a notice for a research fellowship in France, but my grandmother passed away when I was thinking of applying and I had to leave Delhi. I came back on last date of application, missed a class and hurriedly applied as I know I’ll regret this if I didn’t even try. Within 4 days of finishing my masters I was on a plane to Paris, on a very generous European Union fellowship. | **Acting on Privilege**  **Access opportunities, try new things**  **Create opportunities** |
| When I had first gone to Delhi, I didn’t think I was capable of going to one of the best universities in the world. Only people who came from posh families, whose parents coached them since they were little children and who were very intelligent went to Oxford. Whereas the school I went to had been sold to become a hotel. Looking back what worked was opening my mind to learn from people I once looked down upon and getting inspired, instead of intimidated, by people I thought were better than me. I felt if he or she can, I can too. I decided not to live my life from one day to the next but work towards a goal. And my goal was to go to Oxford. With this mindset, I worked hard not because my parents told me to, but because of where I wanted to get. Hard work without proper direction is not enough, other than inspiration I sought guidance from my friends and seniors.  Now you will have a better idea how I finally got there. I took inspiration and learnt from those around me, I recognized my privilege and decided to look for and make the most of opportunities and I persevered. I got into Oxford but didn’t have a scholarship. I followed the same principles and decided to try, if it still didn’t work out I atleast wouldn’t feel I didn’t give it a good shot. Hundreds of e-mails later, a professor who supported my application, put me in touch with the rector of one of Oxford’s oldest colleges who granted me full funding. Perseverance again paid off. I put in a lot of hard work but when I was chasing a goal I had set for myself, by learning from my environment, it never felt like that |  |
| Lastly speaking of success, it is important to add that famous schools, fancy jobs, lots of money are not all there is. A boy in my Oxford college died from drinking too much alcohol. Surely not what his parents wanted for him. Lots of people are very unhappy in their jobs and lots of people are very depressed inspite of being very rich. I realised all these things only add value to life of you’ve also worked on being happy. Like success there is no formula for happiness, but I picked some good practices down the years. Talk to someone; a parent, friend, cousin, teacher, anyone you think you can confide in. Young men and women your age are under a lot of pressure while your body is undergoing many changes, bottling up your emotions is not healthy. Sharing your feelings with someone or even writing them down as a start is important. Staying physically active and having a few hobbies further help. While you’re learning about colleges and jobs and opportunities, also take time to care for yourself. It’ll make you more productive, more ambitious, but most importantly more happy. |  |
| Like I said in the beginning I don’t have a strategy for success, but as my little niece is growing up, I will not ask her to study hard for four years, take science stream or that board exams will decide her fate. I’ll teach her  to realise that not everyone has the opportunities that she does,  to not look down on anyone - almost everyone can teach you something,  to stay inspired – have role models, look upto friends and seniors she wants to be like, learn from them,  to persevere, take chances even if she fears being judged by others – in the long run every attempt teaches you things you didn’t anticipate,  to not be disheartened at not making it but for not trying.  Finally I’ll tell her success is meaningless without happiness. |  |
| Thank you |  |