

A Brief Analysis of the Subjective Reasons for Chris's Success in The Pursuit of Happyness

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Abstract

In life, opportunities and challenges coexist, and success and failure are linked. In today's society, it is difficult to figure out the factors that affect people's success or failure; however, there is always a way to succeed and a reason to fail. In an environment where people aspire to success and seek to realize their self-worth, it is a long and arduous process to learn to overcome the causes of failure, uphold one's beliefs, and ultimately achieve success, and the American film *The Pursuit of Happyness* can bring inspiration accordingly. The film is based on a true incident, and the main character, Chris, is modeled after African-American investment expert Chris Gardner. In the film, despite the misfortunes of both his career and his family, Chris is able to create his own happiness through his struggle and enterprising spirit in the end. The success of Chris in the film can be attributed to several factors. Based on the analysis of the direction Chris chooses to struggle, his beliefs, willpower, love for his son, and attitude, this article explores the subjective factors that lead to his eventual career success. Through the analysis of the subjective reasons for Chris's success, it will positively impact people's lives and help them to shape positive values, so that even in adversity, people will still struggle and work hard to get their own achievements.

Keywords

The Pursuit of Happyness; Success; Faith; Willpower.

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction

According to Luo, it can be said that the eyesight determines height, and height determines choice. Choice is more important than effort (Luo, 2020). Among the various choices of work and life, the significance of direction cannot be ignored. If the direction is wrong, the harder one works, the further away one may be from the success.

The choice of direction is more a matter of inner conviction. A senior journalist in *The Biographer* once concluded that the most valuable quality in a successful person is an indomitable spirit that lasts to the end. Whether in life or at a job, people who are not focused well or who are only enthusiastic for a short time always fail, while people who have made certain achievements are often supported by faith, persistence, and self-discipline. Everyone will encounter different choices and setbacks, so how to choose the way forward and stick to it? And how to fight in the face of adversity or at the lows of life? In the film *The Pursuit of Happyness*, the deeds and spirit of Chris are worthy of pondering.

The pursuit of Happyness, a classic work, is narrated throughout with the ordinary life and extraordinary story of the main character. The story is set in the 1980s when the American economy was in recession, and everything seemed so fragile and vulnerable; it was a time when everyone was depressed. Chris was no exception, plunging into an endless abyss, suffering a series of career setbacks and the breakdown of his marriage, all of which presented a harsh and realistic picture of American society. *The pursuit of Happyness* is also an inspirational movie.

Chris' strength was limited. The sadness, despair as well as pain took over his entire being, but the will of him was infinite, because the ill-fated man finally shaped his life as a wonder with all his might. It can be said that all difficulties do not last forever, and the successes achieved by someone through struggle are immortal.

2. Literature Review

In the movie *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Chris, through his struggle and enterprising spirit, eventually builds a world of his own. Through the analysis of the subjective reasons for his success, it will have a certain positive impact on people's life and help people shape the positive values.

The film presents a harsh and realistic view of American society, with the main character, Chris, who suffers career setbacks and family break-ups. But with his tenacity and perseverance, Chris manages to make a comeback against the odds, entering the financial industry as a stockbroker and later founding his own company through the efforts. In the early stage, the academic circle tended to study the reasons for the protagonist's ultimate success from a macro perspective of American cultural values. Most of the early studies were based on the view that the life of the protagonist in the film had successfully illustrated the "American Dream" and the core of American cultural values, which is individualism; at the same time, a large number of studies also praised the positive qualities of the hero himself, believing that his success could not have been achieved without his own optimism and perseverance. The success Chris achieves is attributed to his unremitting struggle and extraordinary courage.

The analysis of the subjective reasons for Chris's success conforms to the research in the area of the qualities necessary for success and is important for further exploring qualities other than mindset and perseverance, such as choosing the right direction. Chris's good qualities help to remind people, both in their studies and in the workplace, to focus on choosing their own direction and sticking to it, and to face setbacks with an optimistic mindset.

Overall, this literature review examines the academic analysis of the reasons for Chris's success. Most of the studies, both foreign and domestic, are based on American culture and the American Dream, while some are based on American individualistic values - the pursuit of freedom, equality and happiness, and some focus on praising Chris's own precious qualities. The difference is that some of the foreign studies study the reasons for Chris's success from a psychological perspective, while some domestic scholars have used the concept of values promoted in China to analyze the subjective reasons for Chris's success.

3. The Common Phenomenon of Success and Failure

3.1. The Mainstream Definition of Success and Failure

3.1.1. Definition of Success

The official definition of "success" is something or an event that achieves or realizes a measure of value, resulting in an expected result. While everyone has their own set of standards, so the word "success" has been given a thousand distinct connotations. Taking the economy for example: some individuals believe that earning a million dollars is a success, while others believe it takes hundreds of millions, and some even aspire to be on the Forbes list. And according to Dyke and Murphy, the definition of success differs in gender since they have different identities, social connections, and needs (Dyke & Murphy, 2006), let alone individuals. To define "success" into a simple meaning is intricate, therefore, the interpretation of "success" could have distinct boundaries and different levels.

3.1.2. Definition of Failure

Failure includes not achieving the intended goal, as well as being vanquished by the opposing side. Yet the essence of failure can be considered as giving up and losing the guts to start afresh. As a result, failure is defined not just on the surface, but to a greater extent, on the spiritual level. It is a failure if a person continually falls into a defeated state of mind; however, it is not a failure if a person learns from each loss and never loses the bravery to try again. And people learn from Ding's remarks that failure has both cognitive and practical elements, failure and truth are both opposite and intertwined by each other, regardless of either aspect of failure. Therefore, failure is simply relative and can be turned into success under the right circumstances (Ding, 1987).

3.2. The Main Subjective Factors in the Success and Failure of People

3.2.1. Subjective Factors for Success

Chen mentioned that self-confidence and hard work play positive and dynamic roles as the psychological factors in the internal cause of success (Chen, 1982).

Everyone is an individual who is born unique and does not need to be a duplication of anyone else. Confident people dare to try new areas and discover their interests as well as talents more quickly, and are more likely to succeed (Li, 2015). In the movie *The Pursuit of Happyness*, being a normal salesman, Chris opted to become a stockbroker, which took a lot of guts, also, his self-assurance did play a key role in the last interview. If there is no camera to record Chris' story from the third perspective, his endless attempts in desperate situations can hardly be known and believed. Once people have the self-confidence to challenge themselves, they have taken the first step toward success, meanwhile, it's worth emphasizing that while keeping confident, it is critical to maintain a humble and prudent attitude.

One reaps what one sows. It takes more than talent to make someone shine; it also takes hard work. Only those who work hard will have the opportunity to succeed (Zhuo & Lin, 2019). So just to keep moving forward, even if there is little reward in the end, during the process, it is crucial to be able to learn how to persevere, and during which, anything learned will become the cornerstone of the next attempt. Keep the faith and go beyond oneself with ongoing attempts, the opportunity to achieve greatness will always be in one's own hands.

3.2.2. Subjective Factors for Failure

According to Chen, a lack of goal orientation and poor time management skills are the root causes of students' poor learning efficacy (Chen, 2015). Similarly, in the paper on how to avoid or lessen students' poor academics and behaviors, it is noted that achievement goal orientation has a significant impact on students' commitment to study, and time management helps to improve students' positive coping strategies (Huang & Xu & Fu, 2017). And the negative consequences of the lack of both can also be manifested in daily life, as Li claims that the organic combination of both goal management and time management can boost employee execution (Li, 2016).

Many people are perplexed at work because they can't find an objective, so they muddle through their work and blame themselves for squandering time. If a person fails to improve with the passing days due to the lack of objectives, self-discipline and contemplation, a failed life will inevitably emerge. The optimum state for an individual is to identify the pursuing direction, and then go all out. The progress in achieving goals is also an effective driving force of goal pursuit under specific conditions (Som & Dubelaar & Chowdhury, 2019). Therefore, as long as things are being implemented, the process of moving forward will also become the motivation to achieve the goal.

According to Chen, college students get a low score in time control (Chen, 2018), and so do some adults. Many people indeed desire to undertake something, but they frequently use the lack of time as an excuse, resulting in the work being put on hold or even not being started. In fact, the

problem is not a shortage of time, but rather a failure to prioritize tasks and plan ahead of time. Chris' tale is an excellent example of effective time management. Since he became an unpaid intern at a securities firm, he had to work day and night for six months, competing with 19 other applicants for only one position. To sustain basic livelihood, he needed to sell medical equipment throughout the day, and he had to pick up his son from school, then caught a bus to the shelter for spending the night. It appears that Chris did not have time to learn about security, however, he learned it while waiting for the bus, sitting on the bus, and waiting in line at the shelter, when the shelter's lights went off, he even made his own study lighting equipment for study. These movie clips explicitly show how to save a little time everywhere, then add it up to do what people aspire to do.

4. Analysis of Chris's Success in the Film *The Pursuit of Happyness*

The Pursuit of Happyness tells the story of Chris, facing a series of disappointments, finally succeeded after a succession of unwavering personal efforts (Zhang, 2012). So it is worth studying how Chris, the protagonist of the film, rose to the challenge in the face of adversity and found hope in the midst of despair. Chris' success is admired by lots of people, and more than the secret of success, his traits, strong beliefs, and tenacity are worth learning.

4.1. Synopsis of *The Pursuit of Happyness*

The Pursuit of Happyness is inspired by the autobiographical novel of Chris Gardner, a black American investment expert. It is obvious that there is a mistake in the word "Happyness", there might be two reasons. One is to imply Chris' misfortune because there is no "i" (the main character, Chris) in the word; the other reason is to foreshadow the main character's struggle because the word for happiness should have "i" in it, and while it doesn't, so Chris determines to find true happiness and pursue it on his own. The film follows Chris as he spends all his savings on portable bone-density scanners, but with unnecessary function and high price, few doctors accept it. Later, when he wished to apply for a position at the stock exchange and finally obtained the internship, he was told that the internship was unpaid for the first six months. Life presents problems for Chris time after time, and he still has to hold up for his son while struggling painfully. In the last minutes of the film, the plot was finally reversed that Chris gained the position at the securities company. No loud cries, no hysteria from repression throughout the film, only after being accepted by the securities company, did Chris raise his hands in the crowd to applaud himself, and when hugging his son in the kindergarten, he finally released his joy, his exciting emotions.

The brilliance of such an inspirational film is that it offers hope to people who are striving to find a way to persist in the face of adversity. Persevering takes a long time, and success isn't attained by haphazardly slogging through a few months, what is most needed in the lengthy and laborious process of perseverance is encouragement, and *The Pursuit of Happyness* offers the ideal encouragement.

4.2. A Brief Description of Chris

Chris is a salesperson in the film who struggles to sell medical equipment and earn a meager income, and his wife eventually leaves him because she cannot bear both the stress from life and job. One day, Chris asks two questions to a man who seems joyful and drives a red convertible: "What do you do? And how do you do it?" After getting the answer, Chris' goal of becoming a stockbroker blossomed in his heart. Despite others' doubts and slim chances of success, Chris seeks his light without hesitation. Despite all the hardships, being kicked out of a hotel for rent arrears, lining up at a shelter, drawing blood for money, hiding in a subway toilet when he had nowhere else to go, Chris has no intention of giving up and always educates his son with a positive attitude.

Song depicts Chris as a running figure (Song, 2011), twice chasing the homeless man who stole his portable bone-density scanners, always running with his scanners to interviews, meeting clients, picking up his son from school, rushing to the shelter, and every day he is on the road to catch up with time. With all the misery Chris has suffered, instead of complaining about the injustice of fate, Chris always fights against life and presents a state of spirit that cannot be beaten. With his resilience and perseverance, he finally becomes a stockbroker.

No one can picture Chris' journey from penniless to millionaire, only Chris himself can understand all the grief and experience. This is only a two-hour movie from audience's perspective, but for Chris, this is his experience as a father of all the difficulties and hardships.

4.3. Subjective Reasons for the Success of Chris

4.3.1. Direction

The ship does not always sail smoothly on the sea and can be caught in a storm at any time, and then all the helmsman needs to do is to find the right course to keep the ship from getting lost in the endless sea. And the same is true of life. Working hard and being clear about the goals are something that young people of our generation must do more than ever before (Pi, 2018). Finding an appropriate path for life is a difficult endeavor that necessitates a lengthy process, and with full self-awareness and persistent groping, one may find the appropriate path.

Finding a proper path is the priority for success, and Chris chose to work in the field of stock, however, learning to dance may not be so easy for him. The choice of direction, that is, the determination of the goal to strive for, also needs to be based on one's actual ability or talent. In the film, Chris' sensitivity to numbers can be seen in his ability to shorthand phone numbers, and his strong logical ability can be seen in his ability to put together a Rubik's cube through his own efforts to prove himself in front of the Human Resource head. From these two aspects, Chris's success was predictable because he had the talent to pursue the path of a stockbroker. As a result, for Chris, he had chosen the right direction to work towards. "People always have the last freedom in any extreme situation," Viktor Emil Frankl once said, "and that is the power to select their own attitude." Therefore, once people have this freedom, the most essential thing is to know how to keep the forward-looking attitude and make the best decision for themselves. Direction is not only a choice but also a creation, as the direction in which one strives can be enlightened in every step one takes. So it is also crucial to remember that direction requires struggle. Only when one is fully dedicated and immersed in whatever one is doing at the moment, can one know exactly how to adjust the situation to make the efforts more effective. Simultaneously, it is critical to learn to reflect and learn from experience, as well as to attempt new things beyond one's competence, and then to keep trying and never giving up, and with that comes the appropriate direction.

4.3.2. Endeavour

Continuous striving and pursuit are the ways to happiness (Pan, 2014), and Chris' story is a perfect illustration. There was no single moment of normal pace since Chris had spent all his savings on portable bone-density scanners, and in the process of selling the scanners, he did not forget to find a formal job. Even with zero knowledge for the stock securities, he was full of determination. While other applicants submitted their job applications and went home to wait for the result, Chris was trying to create opportunities for his chances of being hired. When he didn't get the interview notification, he tried to speak with the personnel director, and eventually, they were able to share a cab, where Chris showed his abilities in the car by working out the Rubik's Cube, which led him to an interview.

In the face of the difficulties, Chris can cope with it calmly, he knew he was at a disadvantage at the starting line, but he would not lose on effort. No one can calculate the time as precisely as he did, running the business to find customers during the day, picking up his son from school

in the afternoon, rushing to the shelter, learning knowledge and repairing scanners at night. When the risks, challenges, and opportunities coexist, Chris was always ready for them. With less than ten dollars in his wallet, he went across the region to apologize to the wealthy businessman he missed but accidentally got the chance to go to a football match with the businessman, where he made additional personal connections. Perhaps the film did not show enough close-ups, but Chris, as a man who had never studied the relevant security knowledge, was able to answer all of the questions in the written test swiftly, he must have put in more effort than others can realize. Success is always reserved for those who are prepared, and Chris prepared so well for his later success.

4.3.3. Willpower

It's not just because Chris can suffer and endure pain more than the average person, it's more about his will that cannot be crushed. The will, because of its tenacity, can be regarded as the main and essential factor of happiness and joy in life. Unlike the vagaries of circumstances, will is not something that fate can easily dictate, nor can it be easily reversed by man. It is thanks to the strong will that Chris was much happier than other people affected by the economic crisis. Chris did not bow to fate, nor did he give in to the challenges issued by life, but went forward with determination, and both the running days and the hunger made him more convinced that the light of tomorrow was ahead. Flesh and blood can be destroyed, but the will of steel will never die. Despite all the difficulties Chris faces throughout the movie, he never gives up (Illicic, 2016). Although every segment is describing Chris's hardships, the belief on his face can always be seen.

With no good environment to study and live, Chris did not give up on himself or life. He engaged in simple trading to support his family at first, which was an ideal life for a black man at the time. But when "disaster" struck, when his wife left, when his and his son's clothes were left at the door, when he took his son with him to the shelter, where the other refugees only looked desperate and they just needed a place to spend the night; Chris, on the other hand, is learning and working for tomorrow. In the end, it was not God's favor that enabled him to achieve his persistent pursuit, but rather Chris own perseverance had opened the door to happiness.

4.3.4. Love

In the movie, as a father, Chris knew the importance of companionship for the loved ones, and he was willing to give all he had to his growing child. In turn, it is because of his son's understanding and companionship that Chris got through the tough times, and this companionship gave him the strength to persevere to the end. Chris may not be a qualified husband, but he was a good father. No matter how hard life was, Chris never gave up on his son and never shirked the responsibility as a father (Wang, 2012). Even if life kept throwing him problems, he still used that frail body to shelter his son from the wind and rain.

Growing up in a single-parent household, Chris met his father for the first time at the age of 28, and he knew that he would be a good father for his son. In one of the movie clips, because Chris did not grab a room at the shelter, he and his son went to the subway station, where they played a game of pretending to be in the primitive society, which was a perfect excuse for a night without accommodation. This is where the story comes to a climax, a strong-willed, high-spirited father finally broke down in tears. As a father, he probably blamed himself for not being able to provide a good environment for his son to grow up in, or for his helplessness at the time. He tried his best to hold his foot against the door to prevent the person outside who was pushing hard to open the door and kept his son's ears covered. Even if he was depressed at that night and desperate for life, none of that trumped his promise to be a good father, so at the same time, his son was also an important factor in his desire to fight and win. On a new day, he was still enthusiastic and motivated as ever, moving forward without a hint of hesitation, and there is not a shot that is not his pursuit and running footsteps.

4.3.5. Attitude

Chris' lifestyle will make him closer to his goal (Mustafalia, 2012). When confronting an economic crisis, unemployment, bankruptcy, it is hard for people to hold on to the dream, by not for Chris. In the movie, each clip of the refugees' hardship is in stark contrast to the rich people's extravagance. The busy scene in the office also contrasts with the idleness in the shelter. While Chris aspired to the intense and busy state of work, not the slackness of the shelter where the lights go out at the end of the day. He could be discouraged by life again and again, but would never give up, he used the positive attitude to enlighten himself and guide the education of his son.

Isn't it a surprise of life that when the interviewer taunted him about not having a suit, he said he had a cool pair of pants? And when he didn't have tickets to go to a football game, he was able to defuse the situation with wit and got the chance to watch the game. In the football game, Chris not only met many wealthy businessmen, but he also effectively marketed himself. Chris was excellent at talking and building relationships, and success is approaching when efforts and circle of friends are expanding. In spite of constant obstacles, Chris always maintained his courage and enthusiasm for life. No matter what problems lie ahead, do not be anxious, just smile to face each loss. Loss may be temporarily suffering, but a smile helps stabilize the mind. As long as one has the bravery to start again from scratch, life can always bring the surprises.

5. The Practical Significance

5.1. Realistic Value for Students in Learning

The priority for students is to identify learning objectives, which can stimulate long-term intrinsic motivation. Nowadays, when some students hit a plateau in learning, they treat homework or exams as impossible tasks and thus lose the desire to learn, which is a reflection of a lack of goals.

As Mattern concluded that many students are motivated in courses by the mastery goals, the performance-approach goals, or a combination of both (Mattern, 2019). Students, who study and explore new information, should realize that if they have a clear and intuitive aim in mind, they would not give up learning easily due to minor obstacles. In other words, Students, especially high school and university students, should find their own direction to strive for. When facing difficulties in study, there is no need to become overly concerned, because wasting time on pain and obsession will not change what has already happened. However, proper anxiety, as a driving force for progress, is crucial to keep students focused. When time and energy are put into self-improvement, the reward will be the pleasure and freedom, which will serve as the powerful motivations to continue learning.

Chris' persevering hard effort and persistent struggle brought his ambition to fruition (Chen, 2016), and this constant persistence is the epitome of willpower. After years of study, students are likely to become exhausted both physically and psychologically, which could wear down the will in learning. In other words, everyone's willpower is finite. Therefore, one needs to learn to focus the will on the most important task, which is learning for students. Each job needs to be improved by gaining experience, and study should be no exception. While the process of experience accumulation is long and arduous, and it requires great willpower. As a result, as long as one has faith in the learning ability, organizes learning life systematically and balances work and rest, he or she will be able to prevent the spread of negative emotions and ensure the successful completion of the learning objectives.

5.2. Practical Implications for People in Life and Work

It is a well-known fact that a depressive attitude always brings negative emotions (Ruo-jun, 2016). Therefore, what is important in life is to maintain a positive outlook. Chris neither gave

up hope on account of financial issues or the unfixed address, nor did he show his pathetic situations to others, and he always wore a clean and straight suit during his internship. Despite his helplessness, he tried his hardest to be responsible for his own life, always had an upward-looking mind, and obtained the only position in the securities company on his own. It is evident in the film that Chris seldom brought the lows and challenges of adult life to home, and he rarely expressed any annoyance or grief to his kid, instead, he always maintained a bright and upbeat attitude, which can be taken as an essential factor in his success.

Many factors can contribute to people's success, among which the most important is the need to optimize the working ability, and the success that is eventually achieved should not be two-dimensional, but three-dimensional and concrete. That is to say, in addition to exterior quantitative factors such as assets and prestige, the internal progress such as fortitude, the ability to tackle problems, and strong psychology tolerance all count as success. When the focus is only on the former, people are likely to feel lost and unsure of how to achieve their goals specifically. As Dennis put it, continuous competency development is required (Dennis, 2016), people should think carefully about what they want to do, what they need to accomplish, and what kinds of challenges they need to overcome, during which the ever-increasing ability is more vital than the success obtained in the end. The ability to deal with unfavorable events and persevere in difficult times ultimately determines how far one can go in something.

Regardless of what kind of situation it is, one should do the best to put out the effort; even if the current situation is not as good as expected, when the day of success is approaching, all the setbacks encountered will be appreciated. Each time, the tribulations will create a better version of oneself, it is because of the disappointments that people can develop an indomitable spirit. Life will not disappoint those who work hard; as long as a person perseveres, opportunities will always appear, when they do, all one has to do is to persistently pursue the maximum value of these opportunities.

6. Conclusion

The Pursuit of Happiness is a narrative about courage and perseverance that can bring people the tears, recollections, and infinite strength in the face of failure, hardship, or misunderstanding. There is a memorable sentence that is worth tasting, which is for his son, "Don't ever let somebody tell you, you can't do something. Not even me. You got a dream, you got to protect it..." In truth, it was also said to Chris himself at the time when he fell into the despair of life, and he tried his best to guard his dream. Chris was eventually able to succeed thanks to his hard work and determination, as well as the opportunities he had constantly created for himself, making use of whatever resources accessible to compete with others.

Much can be learned from the study of the subjective factors that make Chris successful. People sometimes lament the fact that opportunities never come their way, yet this is often due to the lack of preparation, which causes them to miss out on opportunities. Chris' narrative makes it possible for people to discover their own abilities, establish a goal, and work hard to achieve it. The new era, with challenges and opportunities, is similar to Chris's, which is an era of struggle. The foundation can be built, knowledge can be accumulated, but never wait; as long as there is an idea, as long as there is a dream to chase, there is no need to wait. There is a famous saying by Bing Xin that a successful flower is admired for its present splendor, while the bud was soaked in the tears of struggle. Everyone aspires to succeed; therefore, the newly emerging seeds should be watered with unwavering dedication at the very beginning.

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