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It's up to us to make things happen

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WITH the many warm tributes to Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad still echoing throughout the nation, there is general appreciation that besides the many tangible benefits he has bequeathed us, he has also left us with one priceless intangible gift: The joy of work.

His 22-year legacy of service has taught us the art of the possible - that loving people and serving them is the greatest value in life. In the process, he has done his utmost, both in word and deed, to motivate us to become "no limit" individuals.

Though trained as a medical doctor, Dr Mahathir can hold his own in a wide variety of disciplines, ranging from engineering to e-commerce, astronomy, sport, and the liberal arts - to say nothing of international politics.

Many of us may not have given it serious thought, but the Malaysia Boleh slogan is in fact, a highly-charged affirmation designed to inject a Positive Mental Attitude among us. The "believers" will confirm that affirmations with discipline do create miracles.

On innumerable occasions, Dr Mahathir has stressed the need for action, for it is action that unites every great success. Action is what produces results. In one of his many speeches to government servants he is reported to have said words to this effect: "Knowledge is only potential power until it comes into the hands of someone who knows how to get himself to take effective action."

How often have we been caught in the mental trap of being impressed by many successful people and believe they made it simply because of certain special gifts? But when you analyse their lives you will find that their greatest gift over the others is just their ability to take action. It is a gift we can all acquire, if we enjoy working at it.

For them and, indeed for all other entrepreneurs, there is no such thing as failure. There are only results. They see the potential in situations, not the roadblocks. They focus on the positive more than the negative. Like Dr Mahathir, they have discarded limitations and operate from a higher set of resources.

Think about Abraham Lincoln. He failed in business at 21; was defeated in a legislative race at 22; had a nervous breakdown at 27 following the death of a loved one, lost two congressional races at the 34 and 36 and, at the age of 45, lost a senatorial race. He failed in an effort to become vice-president at 47. Lost another senatorial race at 49 and at the age of 52 was elected President of the United States. He would never have become president if he had viewed these events as failures.

Then, there is the famous story about that great inventor, Thomas Edison. After he had tried 9,999 times to perfect the light bulb and hadn't succeeded, someone asked him: "Are you going to have 10,000 failures?" He answered: "I didn't fail. I just discovered another way not to invent the electric light bulb."

There is much evidence to show that people who have attained excellence have followed a consistent path to success. Some describe this as the Ultimate Success Formula. Going by this formula, the first step is to define what exactly it is that you want.

The next step is to take the appropriate action. Without action your desires will remain as desires. That's why it is important that you take the type of action which you believe will produce the result you desire.

Finally, it all boils down to a question of choice. And here I would like to discuss the difference between the Japanese bonsai tree and the giant American "General Sherman" that stands some 80 metres high and measures 25 metres in circumference.

The bonsai remains small no matter how old it gets. In fact, the bonsai only grows 35 to 45 centimetres tall.

When it pokes its head above the ground, the young sapling is pulled from the soil and has its taproot and some of the feeder roots tied. The growth of the bonsai is deliberately stunted. The result is a miniature tree.

The General Sherman, on the other hand, grows freely in the California forest.

A major difference exists between the growing patterns of the General Sherman and the bonsai. The bonsai's growth is purposely stunted, while the General Sherman, which started as a small seed in the rich California soil, was nourished by the minerals, rain and pleasant sunshine.

Neither the General Sherman nor the bonsai had a choice in determining how large each would become. You and I do.

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