

The four things that guarantee success in the life of a young student

After a lifetime of observing, teaching and researching the lives of highly successful students, I believe that I have discovered the secret that can lift youngsters out of poverty and elevate them to greatness. Such insight also draws on my own biography, having lived through struggles and experienced success despite growing up on the Cape Flats,

Four things. It works every time

1. Talent

Everybody has it whether in science and mathematics or in culture and the arts. However, not everybody recognizes that they have talent. In poorer communities where situations in home, school and community reinforce feelings of inadequacy, it is hard to accept that you are talented, able to do great things. You see a student from a well-heeled school with impressive uniform, confident speech, and firm stride, and you feel deflated and stay in what you think is your predestined lane. Wrong, wrong, wrong. You are as smart as anyone else for you also have talent but someone has to tell you, show you, convince you.

2. Opportunity

Talent can only flourish, break through, when it meets *opportunity*. Where talent is internal, opportunity comes from the outside. It is the awe-inspiring teacher that believes in you and teaches in ways that inspire a love of life sciences or history or economics. That is an opportunity for you. It is the school that takes you on field trips, on visits to universities, or brings in astronauts or marine scientists to show you how to connect to the world of work. It is an unexpected bursary for being one of the top three in your class, a study abroad opportunity, or a holiday job in an early childhood center. Note though that opportunity does not always come knocking on your door; the most successful students also look for opportunities; they make their own luck, in other words. When talent meets opportunity an explosive force results that can propel you forward beyond your dreams. But even inherent talent and opportunity given are not enough.

3. Drive

Drive is that deep, internal determination to make the best of every opportunity on offer. It is that fierce commitment to make things happen for you, to turn opportunity into reward. When I got a scholarship to study at an Ivy League university in America, it scared the hell out of me. But I remember saying clearly during a conversation with myself, that whatever happens, I want to be, I will be, the best in my field in the world. Since then I studied 16-18 hours a day. It became joy, not work. I cannot describe the thrill to this day of teaching and researching and writing two or more books per year. Of course I do other things as a sports fanatic who loves hanging out with friends and taking vacations. But when I work, I work really hard. It's called *drive*.

4. Character

If you are not a good, kind and generous person then talent, opportunity and drive would in most cases not take you very far. Character is about being respectful of others. It means showing up on time and not trampling on others to get ahead. It means sharing your talents with those who struggle and reveling in others getting ahead. It also means being possessed of simple attributes like saying 'thank you' for the smallest gift and staying humble regardless of your achievements. Persons of character love working in and learning from teams. You can communicate what you feel and express what you desire. This is what employers look for in a well-balanced employee, and that is what professors desire in a well-rounded student. Hard skills without character means very little in a world where relationships are the bedrock of academic or business success.

But what about Igon Tusk?

Good question. You can get far with 1-3 and even become super-wealthy. That is true. However, with notable exceptions (such as philanthropists) it is almost guaranteed that you will not be a nice person, a generous citizen, or a respected actor in the world. You are likely to be dead inside, abuse chemicals, and live through broken relationships because you lack that elusive thing that makes us whole, gives us direction, fills us with joy, and that with all the money in the world, cannot be bought off a shelf: *character*.