

A Guide to Life for Asian-American Teens

by Jason Shen (jasonyshen@gmail.com)

Hi there. My name is Jason. When I was 13 I picked up *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and it changed my perspective on life forever. I realized that you can usually improve the way you live and behave – you just have to be open and willing to think, learn and experiment.

Here I present 8 years of “effortful study” in creating a better life for yourself. It's not perfect, and neither am I. But it is a start. If you read something here that clicks, USE IT. These words are worthless by themselves, it is only through their application do the words become meaningful. You're parents might want you to read this in hopes that you'll 'shape up'. Ignore that. I'm on your side. =)

Yourself

- ❑ **You have one shot at this thing called life.** The average American life span is roughly 72 years. Let's say you've got a good 40 or 50 more years of quality life, barring some horrible accident. How do you want to spend that time? Why not make the most of it by seeking to live a *great* life?
- ❑ **It's your job to define and pursue your vision of a good life.** It's your job to pursue your vision of a great life. It's ok if you don't really know what that means right now. There is no right or wrong. No one else can do it for you – not your parents, not your friends, not anyone else.
- ❑ **Know thyself.** You'll be spending a long time with yourself, and it's probably a good idea to figure out what kind of person you are. What do you like? What do you care about? What are you good at? What do you want?
- ❑ **Take responsibility for your actions.** This means you apologize when you screw up or hurt someone; you don't blame others for things that happen to you. You're in charge of your actions. Complaining is a waste of time. Starting figuring out what to do about it.

Your family

- ❑ **Understand your family's culture.** They grew up in a different time, a different place where children always respected and obeyed their parents, perfect grades were the only way to a decent future and everyone “suffered first and enjoyed later”. You'd think and act like them if you went through what they did.
- ❑ **You are between worlds.** You came from Asia, but you now live in America where some things are different. You will never be like some of your American friends, but why would you want to? Being Asian is something to be proud of. However, you have to adapt yourself to thrive in American culture.
- ❑ **Families love each other.** Understand that your family loves you and that deep down inside, you love them. They're the few people who will always care about you. That doesn't mean you'll always agree. Your family can still give you great advice on many things, but not everything.

Planning for the future

- ❑ **Don't plan everything.** Don't let anyone make you plan out your whole life or commit to something you feel very uncertain about. Life RARELY ever goes according to plan. Everyone figures things out as they go along – those who say they don't are lying or just blind.
- ❑ **Embrace change.** In the 21st century, people go through an average of half a dozen *careers*. Products, skills, facts have short life-spans and quickly replaced by new ones. Everything is

moving faster. You have got to be able to change: your attitude, your skills, your knowledge.

- ❑ **Experiment to find passions.** Try different things to find a few things (not just one) that you're passionate about. Give a strong honest effort. There's no point in half-assing it. When you are passionate about something you care about it, you learn about it, you talk about it, and you will be willing to invest the effort to get *good* at it.
- ❑ **Assess the market value.** Consider whether your passions lead to something that people get paid to do if they are good enough. If you have to be very good, or it doesn't pay very well, or the definition of "very good" is highly subjective, you might want to think about having some backups as well.
- ❑ **Don't be afraid of failure.** No failure is final. As long as you aren't doing something illegal or highly dangerous, you can always, always bounce back. You are more resilient than you think.
- ❑ **Don't fear success either.** Sometimes people sabotage themselves because they are afraid of succeeding. Don't do that. You deserve to experience success.

Necessary skills

- ❑ **Learn how to learn.** The way things are going, you'll need to be learning something everyday for the rest of your life. Enjoy it; get good at it.
- ❑ **Learn how to be social.** Learn how to meet new people, to strike up conversation, make someone laugh, ATTRACT somebody.
- ❑ **Learn where to find resources.** Knowledge resources, material resources, and especially human resources. The final one is so important for Asian Americans – having mentors who can help you is critical and building a "network" for the future is so key. You can only work with what you've got, but the more you can get, better off you are.
- ❑ **Learn how to use and take care of your body.** It's the one you're stuck with for the rest of your life; it can either help you or hold you back. Pick up a sport or at least stay active. Try to eat well and get enough sleep. It's worth it. You'll feel a lot better.
- ❑ **Learn how to get organized.** Unless you become a hermit, you're life *will* get crazy. You will have many things on your plate and be expected to handle them all. I'm not saying you have to be a neat freak but you do have to have some kind of system for keeping track of the things you have to do and where you've put things.
- ❑ **Master those five and you are good to go.** Once you have those skills, you'll be able to figure out what you need to do in most situations. Usually it involves learning about your situation, figuring out what the best thing to do is, and then doing it.

Final thoughts

- ❑ **You have it so good.** You are richer, healthier, and better off than most of the world. Out of all the people that have ever lived, your life is materially better than 99.9% them. Ancient kings couldn't drive cars, send Facebook messages, or read magazines while on the toilet. In fact, they didn't even have toilets. Poor people (ie non-royalty) had it even worse. Don't be spoiled.
- ❑ **Luck plays a big part in everyone's life.** Be humble about your success, and don't get too bummed about your failures. Just do your best – that's all anyone can ask of you.
- ❑ **Be kind.** Every person, every living being is connected through a bond. This is no spiritual hokey-pokey. Try to avoid doing harm whenever you can and help out whenever possible.
- ❑ **Live in the moment.** Life happens in everyday moments. By all means reflect on the past and think about the future. But life is lived in the here and now.