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The Success Principles: How to Get From Where You Are to Where You Want to Be

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FROM VICTIM TO VICTORY

Raj Bhavsar was born to be a gymnast. It was the natural career choice for a kid who at the age of four lived to climb up things, like trees and furniture, and jump off of them. His parents, worried that he'd hurt himself and destroy their house, signed him up for gymnastics classes at a nearby gym. Raj quickly fell in love with the sport, and by the age of 10, he wanted to be the best at this sport that he loved and represent his country in the Olympics.

He began focusing intensely on becoming a better gymnast, and soon the successes began to show up. He started coming in first and second place at competitions and was a five-time Texas champion by the time he entered high school.

His high school and college years were a blur of awards and championships: Regional State Champion, National Champion, Senior National team, and then placement in two medal-winning championship teams. In his mind, he was unstoppable.

In 2004, Raj was competing for a spot on the U.S. Olympic gymnastics team. Of the 12 routines he'd done, 11 of them had been perfect. Everybody agreed, he was a shoo-in. Elated, he was thinking, *Greece, here I come!*

But at the conclusion of the trials, when they read off the names of the Olympians, his wasn't on the list. Then he heard the words, "Raj Bhavsar, alternate." In that moment his whole world—everything he'd been working toward for a decade and a half—was shattered. His expectations were sky-high and tangled up in his self-worth, so when they weren't met on that awful day in 2004, he came down to earth with a crash. For the next few years, he burned with one desire: to find out why he'd been denied. He needed to find "someone to blame."

Raj went to Greece as an alternate, but it was a bittersweet experience watching his teammates work out together and compete day after day. Unofficially, he was part of the team, yet it was clear that he wasn't really one of them. He never had a chance to compete, and he returned from the trip disillusioned and lost.

Back at home, he did some serious soul searching. He asked himself, *Do I truly enjoy gymnastics? Do I love the competition, regardless of the score and the accolades?* The answer was "Yes!" So he decided to recommit himself to being a gymnast, and this time, to throw himself into the sport, not just to win competitions, but for the art of it, and the love of it.

But without the intense drive to win, his performance suffered. At the 2007 US Nationals, held nine months before the 2008 Olympic team was selected, he bombed. His performance was rocky and for the first time in nine years, he didn't even make the national team. He had to own up to the truth: what he was doing wasn't working.

A few days later, a friend of his, a 2000 Olympian himself, handed him a book, and said, "You need to read this." He took it from him and saw on the cover a picture of a white-haired guy with a big smile, and the words: *How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be*. He thought, *No book can help me get where I want to be; my problem is different*. But when his coach recommended the same book a few days later, he decided to give it a chance.

I'll let Raj tell the rest of the story.

"The book was *The Success Principles*, and one of the first things Jack Canfield says is that, to be successful, you have to take 100% responsibility for everything that happens in your life. That was a tough one to swallow. I was sure that life had played against me, and that if I could just figure out what had really gone down, I could make it right.

But now I saw that beating that very dead horse had gotten me exactly nowhere. Whatever had happened was done, and harboring all that anger was useless. For me, committing to take 100% responsibility meant turning all that "looking for someone to blame" energy inward and starting to analyze how my brain worked. Where was my fear coming from, and what was causing the negative loop of thoughts in my head?

In *The Success Principles*, Jack writes that even the most successful people have to deal with fear and negativity on a daily basis, and yet they still choose to go forward toward their goals. Man! That really hit home for me. I'd thought that struggling with those things meant I was broken. Now I didn't feel so isolated and alone. Negative thoughts, rejection, fear—they're just part of the process. But now they became challenges for me to overcome, rather than huge roadblocks and evidence of my failure.

My coach said it was like I had flipped a switch; he could see the light go on in me. The next week in the gym, working with him on my training plans, I recommitted to my dream of being an Olympian, and from that point on, I spent 24 hours a day devoted to this goal. But the goal had expanded: I now wanted to be an Olympian in *life*.

Following another piece of Jack's advice about the power of visualization, I made a huge vision board and a mind map and put them up on my bedroom wall. They were the first things I saw when I walked into the room. Every day after practice I looked at them and said, "Yep. Yep. Doing that. Doing that. Doing that." They helped me break down my huge, lofty, overwhelming Olympic goal into areas of daily focus that I could manage.

Inspired by Jack's book, I also harnessed the energy of my subconscious mind by using affirmations. Every night before I went to bed, I wrote *I am on the 2008 Olympic Team*. *I am on the 2008 Olympic Team*, over and over and over, filling up more than 100 notebook pages, front and back.

Before long, *The Success Principles* became the "working bible" of our gym. The coaches routinely referenced the principles, and my teammates and I used them to inspire each other. It became an energy you could feel within our gym.

I made it to the 2008 Olympic tryouts in Philadelphia, and sailed right through. I felt happy and clear and on top of my game. When they called ten of the gymnasts

competing for the remaining two spots on the Olympic team into the boardroom, I was very, very confident. I'd nailed all my routines. I had done all this work on my life. Hey, I'd read *The Success Principles* and put them into practice! I thought, *For sure, they're gonna name me to the team this time.*

But, when they read off the names of the two team members, I didn't hear my name. *What?!* I threw my hands up into the air. It was a gesture of absolute bewilderment about life and the universe and its workings. In a cruel repeat of 2004, I heard the words, "Raj Bhavsar, alternate."

When a reporter from NBC asked me how I felt about being named an alternate a second time, I answered with one sentence, "There is no external event that can defeat my sense of inner accomplishment."

Sitting on the plane back to Houston, I took stock of the situation. I wasn't mad the way I'd been before. When you take 100% responsibility for your life, anger and frustration just don't stick around that long. Plus, I had developed the philosophy that gymnastics was just one piece of me, not my entire being, so if I didn't get this, I was still going to be okay. Still, I was honestly baffled and taken aback that after all I had done, I hadn't made the team again.

At home, I set my bags down inside my apartment and took a walk. There was a long colonnade of trees on both sides of the street, making a canopy of branches above me. I remember stopping at one point and looking up through a small opening in the trees to the night sky. I stood there, staring up at the stars. There was no anger. I wasn't asking "Why?" Instead, I felt a sense of peace and connection with the universe.

And although part of me was ready to put out the fire in my heart to be an Olympian, in that moment something in me said, "Keep the dream alive! There's no way this is over." The next morning, I called the USA Gymnastics officials and told them I'd be honored to be an alternate.

For the next week, I trained hard and stayed ready. Then it was announced that Paul Hamm, the 2004 gold medalist and now on the Olympic team for 2008, had made the decision to withdraw from the US Olympic team due to injuries. One of the three alternates would be chosen to replace him. The committee would decide which one of us it would be within 24 hours. It was probably the most excruciating, yet exciting, 24 hours of my entire life.

The next day was decision day. At the gym, my coach, my sports performance counselor, and I got on the phone with the USA Gymnastics PR person, who started the call by reviewing Paul's situation. Then the president of USA Gymnastics came on the line to give the official announcement. He went into his whole spiel, saying, we're very happy about this decision, and on and on. Inside I'm begging him, *Say the name! Just say the name! Please, is it me or not?!*

Finally he said, "So at this time we'd like to announce the new member of the 2008 Olympic team...Raj Bhavsar." With a shout, I fell to my knees. Then, smiling and crying at the same time, I stood up and hugged my coach. I hugged my counselor. I hugged everyone.

After my celebration in the office, I quickly began focusing on the job ahead. It was going to be a challenge because we were primarily a team of rookies. And then when we got to Beijing, Paul's brother Morgan Hamm was also injured and had to be replaced, so now we were a brand new team, not a single one of us had any Olympic

experience. The entire media and even people in the gymnastics community had completely written us off, many thinking we might not even make it into team finals.

That was when I committed to doing whatever I could to help keep our outlook positive. We weren't going to let someone else's opinion affect our performance. The night before the competition, after reading all the doom and gloom from the press, the six of us all went out onto the balcony and had a meeting. We talked about caring for each other as human beings first, and as athletes, second, and about having each other's backs no matter what happened. The road we were about to take was ours to cherish forever, win or lose. It was the most grounding, humbling talk I've ever had with teammates. It gave us the confidence to walk onto the competition floor as a team, first and foremost, with our heads held high, regardless of the result.

The next day we went out there and had the meet of our lives. With the entire arena chanting, "U.S.A. U.S.A." we edged out the Germans, and in an incredible upset, won a bronze medal! It was the most wonderful feeling imaginable—we were so proud of ourselves, of each other, and of our country. I went home and pinned my medal to my vision board, where it is to this day.