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100 YEARS OF SUCCESS

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*To my Finnish family,
my three inspiring Finnish miracles.*

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Finlandia – Ode to Finland

*O Finland strong
O Finland full of beauty
You were so long
Earning your liberty
You could not be—
You could not serve—another
Your path was marked
In dignity
You could not stop
You would not run for cover
Your sisu blazed
Through a century*

*O Finland proud
O Finland land of plenty
A story loud
Of true ability
You found your peace
And showed us ways to prosper
That few have seen in history
Your time has come
To show your kind of power
A spark of trust in humanity*

Lyrics written by André Noël Chaker to the melody of the Finlandia Hymn by Jean Sibelius. The song was released in the autumn of 2017 as an official part of the Centenary of Finland's Independence programme.

Introduction

Be realistic: Plan for a miracle.

Osho Rajneesh

The miracle of Finland

I have always been interested in what makes people, businesses and nations succeed. Our undying quest for success at all levels of our lives is an intrinsic part of the human condition. It is the motor that keeps most of us moving forward from one day to the next.

Success, of course, means different things to different people. It also has frames of reference that vary greatly on the basis of national culture. For the purposes of this book, I have given success a plain and straightforward definition. It is the fulfillment of a set of personal or collective objectives. The cultural context for the success I speak of here is generally based on Western precepts and values, with a particular reference to the culture of Finland.

I am a Canadian immigrant, transformed into a **New Finn**. With over twenty-five years spent in Finland, I have now lived longer in my adoptive country than in my native Canada. For most of my career I have worked in international organizations and businesses. I have had the pleasure and privilege of working closely with people

representing dozens of different cultures and language groups from all over the world.

When I discovered Finland and its special culture, I was immediately impressed with the country and its spirit. I have come to believe that there is something special about **Finnishness**, to the point where I ultimately felt the need to produce this book.

Finnishness is here defined as a set of cultural and behavioral characteristics shared by most people living in Finland. In these pages, I present a general roadmap for success called the **Possibility Model**. It is presented in the form of a mountain climb marked by several determining stops on the ascent to possible success. For each of these stops, I use Finnish examples, stories and testimonials of success and failure. Through this exercise, I hope the reader will gain a new perspective on generating success at all levels, as well as an original outlook on Finland and its people.

In the minds of some, Finland is a miracle. Not in its size or its impact on world affairs, but in its survival against the odds and in the way that it still prospers. The Finnish state is near the top of the world both geographically and in terms of a wide range of social and economic measures. Indeed, during their relatively short one-hundred-year national history, the Finns have been doing a lot of things right. I have seen this repeatedly on my frequent travels around the country. Since the publication of the first edition of *The Finnish Miracle*, I have had the pleasure of speaking to over 400 companies and organizations around the country. In Finland, I have seen miracles happen, large and small, and many of them are presented here on paper for the benefit of those who may find them inspiring.

In its evolution as a nation, Finland can be considered a success under many of the most common and significant international socio-economic and political standards. Some recent international examples include:

Social indicators

- **Best basic education in the world overall:** PISA 2003(1st), 2006 (1st), 2009 (3rd), 2012 (12th), 2015 (5th). Most literate country in the world: World's Most Literate Nations 2016.
- **Among the top 10 healthiest nations in the world:** Global Burden of Disease Study 2015.
- **Happiest country in the world** (along with Denmark): Gallup World Poll 2010.
- **Greenest country in the world:** Environmental Performance Index 2016.

Political indicators

- **Safest and most stable country in the world:** World Economic Forum 2016 & Fund for Peace 2016.
- **Best-governed country in the world:** Global Prosperity Index.
- **1st in freedom-of-the press worldwide, 2010–2016, 3rd in 2017:** World Press Freedom Index.
- **Most socially progressive country in the world:** Social Progress Index.
- **Least corrupt country in the world:** Transparency International 2007 (always in the top 10 since then, 3rd in 2016).

Economic indicators

- **Best quality of life in the world:** Social Progress Imperative 2016.
- **2nd most innovative nation in the world and most innovative country per capita in the world:** World Economic Forum 2016.
- **Among the top 10 most-competitive countries in the world:** World Economic Forum 2000–2016.

These represent an enviable record for a relatively young nation, one that has come a very long way in gaining its independence and developing its prosperity. Indeed, at the end of the 19th century, Finns were beleaguered by famine and poverty. In 1868, a great famine wiped out approximately 15 percent of the national population. In the early 20th century the country endured a civil war that, measured by loss of life per capita, is one of the bloodiest civil conflicts in the history of Europe. During World War II, Finland fought an incredible set of wars against both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. In the mid-20th century the country had to build an industrial base practically from scratch to pay its war debts.

These highlights from Finland's historical trials are certainly evidence that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. They also place the long list of stellar national accomplishments into better perspective.

From a purely economic perspective, the last 100 years have been a Finnish miracle of sorts. From its declaration of independence in 1917 until the year 2016, the GDP of Finland has grown by an annual average of

2.4 percent. Only Japan has a better growth record over this time period (see graph for 100 years of Finnish GDP growth in Appendix I).

Like many nations, however, Finland has faced and still faces challenges: it is by no means a perfect Shangri-La. In fact, when reading about their scores on some of the international studies mentioned above, many Finns remain skeptical and sometimes ask: “Are the other nations so bad?”

Indeed, studies such as the ones listed here are notoriously subjective and inexact by nature. Even for those at the top of these charts, there is still much room for improvement. In the end, we are all human, and humanity still has a long way to go before we can stop wishing for things to get better.

I have had the privilege of interviewing prominent Finnish persons from all walks of life in my quest for a better understanding of the relationship between Finnishness and success. The list of these Finns is reproduced in **Appendix 2** of this book. I am deeply grateful to them for their time and for their special insights. With each of them, I started by asking four basic questions:

1. What is the greatest Finnish success story?
2. What is the greatest Finnish failure?
3. What trait of the Finnish character is the most conducive to success?
4. What trait of the Finnish character is the least conducive to success?

The answers they gave me were invaluable in adjusting the structure of this book and enriching its content. I do

not reproduce all of their answers directly in this manuscript. I do, however, often refer to their views and stories at the relevant stage in our ascent of the Possibility Model.

Most of my interviewees told me that a native Finn would never have written a book like this. Indeed, it is not in the national character to promote yourself in Finland. This, as we will see, is one of the strengths and perhaps also one of the weaknesses of Finnishness. Finns also dislike and even distrust those who analyze an issue and then end up only having positive things to say about it.

Fortunately for them, as a trained lawyer in the art of *audi alteram partem*, I also believe that our quest for the truth lies in our ability to argue both sides of an issue. For this reason, I have made it a point to include, at the end of each chapter, the development opportunities that I see Finland would need to address in order to maintain its stellar social and economic record in the future.

Through its own chain of successes and failures, Finland has managed to pull off some spectacular achievements. I call these “miracles.” For the purposes of this book, a miracle is the manifestation of something so uncommon or unlikely that it stretches our belief of what is possible. Two of the better-known Finnish miracles are: 1) the nation’s survival in its two wars against the Soviet Union, and 2) its creation of a dynamic modern economy, of which Nokia was once the global flagship. There are, however, a host of other minor Finnish miracles that merit commentary and a look into the ways they were achieved.

The Possibility Model

For close to thirty years I have been an avid reader of literature that gives insight into how to create greater possibilities for myself and for others. In this regard, I became particularly attuned to business and social sciences literature. I have always wanted to create a comprehensive yet simple map of where people, companies and even countries are situated at a given stage of their development, with a view to improving our understanding of where they need to go. After failing to find a model to my liking, I decided to draft one of my own. This is how I stumbled onto the **Possibility Model**.

Most business and socio-economic models tend to focus on one part of the chain of actions we need to take in order to enhance our chances for success. Many focus on strategy and vision generation. Others are more hands-on and deliver insights into processes or organizational behavior and even cultural frameworks. Finally, there is a lot of self-help literature that attempts to enhance motivation and the importance of visualization of goals, with emotional appeals to being the best you can be.

Few books, however, have proposed a comprehensive view of how all these elements, and more, should come together in bringing the seemingly impossible into the realm of the possible. This book is an attempt at such a comprehensive approach. It is based on a generic model that allows you to better understand how to generate possibilities and thus improve your chances for success.

Most of us are inspired and fascinated by stories of the impossible made possible. These stories function as

a driver of human development. The struggle to improve our lot or to achieve something that few of us have ever achieved is one of the motors of human progress. At the individual level, making the impossible possible is a notion that both humbles and inspires. For some, the impossible remains but a dream. For others it becomes a reality that sets a new benchmark for what others can hope to attain.

I believe that human miracles occur in part as a result of a certain state of mind, a certain way of living your life or conducting your business. I have summarized these elements in a framework called the Possibility Model, presented below in Figure I-1. This model includes five steps, a set of prerequisites for generating successes. Each of these five steps provides the main topic for one of the five chapters of this book. The steps are as follows:

1. An open mind
2. Trial and error
3. Working harder AND smarter
4. *Sisu*
5. Being yourself

These catchphrases represent a process for making things happen. I have chosen them precisely because they are easy to remember and because they can significantly improve our lives if we simply take a close look at them. When we put all five steps together, they form a powerful framework for understanding the workings of success. Their basic building blocks almost always form a solid part of the foundation of any human success story, whether personal or collective. Moreover, in the

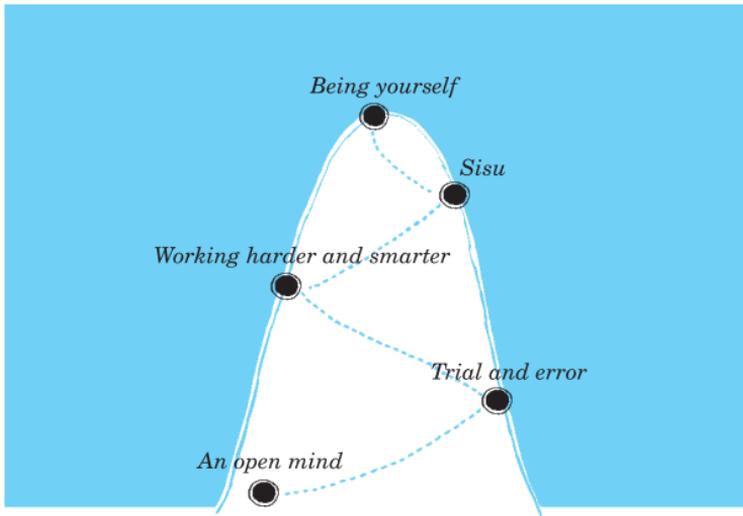


Figure I-1: **The Possibility Model**

coverage of each stage of the Possibility Model, I have given these phrases a specific meaning as part of the larger story of success generation, using many examples from Finland

In Figure I-1, these five elements are metaphorically laid down as stages in a mountain climb. This could be any mountain, of course, but for the purposes of this book I have used a famous Finnish mountain: **Korvatunturi**. For non-Finnish readers, this mountain may not ring a bell, but it has often played a role in making the seemingly impossible possible for millions of children across the world. This mountain is where Santa Claus and his elves do their perpetual work in preparing for Christmas.

Interestingly, the mountain's name in Finnish literally means "ear mountain," which suggests that Korvatunturi has the power to "listen" to the entire world and deliver

on children's wishes everywhere. Such a place is a fitting metaphor for the Possibility Model because of the mountain's mystical ability to connect with our youthful aspirations and to help make our dreams come true.

The journey along the Possibility Model begins with keeping an open mind and ends with being oneself. These stages are set in order of difficulty. The assumption of the model is that it is more difficult to be yourself than to keep an open mind. The model also claims that it is far more challenging to face change and fear with something called Finnish *sisu* than to engage in more routine trial and error.

Another assumption of this model is that each stage is a critical step that should occur in order to maximise your chances for success in any given venture. Though they may overlap to some extent, the earlier stages of the model form a solid sequential base on which the next stage can lay its own foundation.

Finally, the five steps identified here are by no means exhaustive as to all the issues in the eternal quest for human success. They do, however, set forth what I believe to be one of the first comprehensive attempts to evaluate the most critical and sometimes contradictory elements in your journey towards success.

Inevitably, as we shall see in the Finnish stories from later chapters, several other issues come into play when we try to generate success. Pure luck, for example, is certainly one of them. The element of randomness in producing success is more specifically dealt with in Chapter 2, during our analysis of trial and error.

However, luck permeates our lives and our ventures from the beginning to the end. I believe that the forces

of nature and chance and the forces of nurture and human action form a classic yin-and-yang, an essential synergetic dichotomy. You can't have one without the other, and both are inevitable contributors to the outcomes we achieve in life. If our impact on the direction of chance remains low, our ability to influence the nature and sequence of human action needed for success is much higher. This book focuses on the tangible human ability to influence success despite the shortcomings of random chance, which will always remain part of any winning equation.

It can also be said that success can come without systematically working through and succeeding at all of the stages of the model. You can indeed move upward in the Possibility Model and reach some higher level of success without having to master each and every previous level. Few persons and ventures actually perform a perfect ascent towards a successful outcome.

Still, even though you may not need to hit a perfect score at all five levels presented here, these stages are, for the majority of ventures, necessary steps in generating success. As performance improves at each level, the groundwork for making the impossible possible in your field becomes broader and stronger, and offers a greater catalyst for the human miracles you work for and hope to reach.