

# *Contents*

Foreword	ii
<hr/>	
Preface	iv
<hr/>	
PART ONE	1
<i>A Bright Spark!</i>	
<hr/>	
PART TWO	59
<i>A PRAISE™ Champion</i>	
<hr/>	
PART THREE	189
<i>The Franklin in You</i>	
<hr/>	

*All quotations by  
Benjamin Franklin.*



# Foreword

## *The pursuit of self-improvement...*

A grand commemoration of Benjamin Franklin's 300th birthday will occur in 2006. Of the numerous contributions Franklin made, the pursuit of self-improvement was particularly important.

It is very fitting that George Tan, who has absorbed much from Franklin's writings and life, delineates exciting paths for readers to pursue. These observations and principles set goals one can follow to improve their lives, and, by extension their community.

It is through the personal trials and tribulations that Mr Tan confronted in his early years, on through the present, that we learn of Franklin's great inspiration for the author.

Change, creativity, passion, fulfillment, learning and excellence are the principles for lifetime success offered to the reader.

Clearly, there will be many conferences, books, exhibitions, musical compositions, plays, art work, lectures, school programs, and site dedications planned for the Franklin 300th throughout America and the rest of the world.

However, there may not be a tribute as valuable as *Benjamin Franklin: A bright spark!*

**Roy E. Goodman**

*Curator of Printed Materials, American Philosophical Society*

*President, Friends of Franklin, Inc.*

*10 November 2005*



# Preface

*Benjamin Franklin* left such a deep imprint on the soul of humanity that it is impossible for anyone to pass a day without coming into contact with something that he invented, discovered, thought up, popularised or fought for.

He was a founding father of the United States of America, a scientist who contributed greatly to the understanding of electricity and refrigeration; an inventor of the lightning rod, swim fins, bifocal lenses, heating stove and the battery; a civic leader who initiated the public library, fire brigade, fire insurance, liberal arts education... he even drew the first political cartoon and lobbied for the acceptance of printed currency.

Franklin was a witty writer – described on one Internet website<sup>1</sup> as having “a keen mind and an eloquent tongue” – who was well-loved for his many proverbs and wise sayings. There are so many of

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<sup>1</sup> *An Enlightened American.* <http://library.thinkquest.org/22254>

them, all excellent, and you will find a good sampling throughout this book. Franklin truly left his soulprints on many facets of life.

This book looks at Franklin's life in a special way – through the 'eyes' of PRAISE™ a personal life skills model that will help a person get out of mediocrity and conformity to lead himself to accomplish his own unique vision by unlocking his hidden potential.

PRAISE™ embodies six crucial principles for overcoming life's challenges:

- **Prizedream**
- **Rules**
- **Analysis**
- **Invincibility**
- **Strategy**
- **Excellence**

PRAISE™ was developed by me, George Tan, an admirer of Franklin and other men and women who achieved success and excellence. My own achievement was that I overcame tremendous odds growing up in extreme poverty in a neighbourhood ruled by gangsters, and being badly abused by my father. Yet I managed to break free from my inferiority cage, go to university and, after graduation, top both my diploma and master's degree classes whilst holding a full-time career.

When I analysed the life stories of the world's greatest men and women, I saw that they all incorporated the principles of

PRAISE™, even though these people obviously did not know of the model I developed. They used different words and phrases for their guiding principles, but the basic concepts were the same.

I call these masters of greatness ‘PRAISE™ Champions’. They include historical and contemporary figures like Alexander the Great, Abraham Lincoln, Genghis Khan, Confucius, Mahatma Gandhi, Konosuke Matsushita, Mother Teresa, Sun Yat Sen, Florence Nightingale, Thomas Edison... and others.

These are people who achieved greatness in different aspects of life – in military conquests and politics, religion and spirituality, discoveries and inventions, entrepreneurship and charity. They are people from different cultural backgrounds. PRAISE™ is a universal model that is applicable to all.

I hope you will draw inspiration from these people who have achieved success unlimited. By presenting their life stories through the eyes of PRAISE™, I hope also to inspire you to learn this valuable life skills model.

Other books in the PRAISE™ series include:

- ***Rough Life Rich Life***, which presents the PRAISE™ model, with examples from my personal life story as well as the lives of great men and women;
- ***Red Marks to Flying Colours***, which applies the PRAISE™ model to studies, examinations and beyond.

PRAISE™ has helped me ascend from the pits of hopelessness and despair, to transform my rough life into a rich life. You can read more of my life story in the *Soulprints™* series of books:

- *Soulprints™ I – BreakThrough* tells of the struggles and adventures during my growing up years;
- Other books in the *Soulprints™* series continue my life journey through the navy, university, post graduate studies, career and entrepreneurship.

It is my sincere hope that, whatever your present life situation, you will find PRAISE™ useful in turning your life around and leading you to greater achievements and successes.

In our own unique ways, all of us can become PRAISE™ Champions.

George Tan  
28 September 2005



PART TWO  
*A PRAISE<sup>TM</sup>  
Champion*

“*An investment  
in knowledge always  
pays the best interest.*”



# 1790

The shoelace was invented.

US President George Washington delivered the first *State of the Union* address.

Joseph Guillotine proposed a new machine designed to cut off the heads of condemned person as painlessly as possible.

Captain Bligh reported a mutiny onboard the *HMAV Bounty*. The incident inspired several novels and movies.

The US copyright law was enacted. The *Philadelphia Spelling Book* was the first US work to be copyrighted.

Slaves revolted in Haiti.

Denmark became the first country to abolish slavery.

An Aztec calendar stone was discovered in Mexico City.

Goethe's *Faust: Ein Fragment* first appeared.

Emmanuel Kant published his *Critique of Judgement*.

Pineapples were introduced to the Sandwich Islands, which later became Hawaii.

*Benjamin Franklin died at age 84.*

*Benjamin Franklin was an ordinary person who achieved extra ordinary success and excellence. That makes him, by our definition, a true PRAISE™ Champion.*

*PRAISE™ is a personal life skills model that will help a person get out of mediocrity and conformity to lead himself to accomplish his own unique vision by unlocking his hidden potential. It is a universal model that can be applied by people of all cultural backgrounds, in any profession and life situation. The world's greatest men and women – whom we call PRAISE™ champions – have all applied the model to their lives, even if they did so unconsciously. Yet PRAISE™ can be consciously learnt to achieve success and excellence in life.*

*PRAISE™ embodies six crucial principles for overcoming life's challenges:*

- *Prizedream*
- *Rules*
- *Analysis*
- *Invincibility*
- *Strategy*
- *Excellence*

*These six principles, when applied, yields six lifetime success formulas:*

- *Lifetime CHANGE formula: the dream, the vision, is always the starting point for change;*
- *Lifetime CREATIVITY formula: knowing the rules, knowing when to break them and how to think out of the box, leads to creativity;*
- *Lifetime PASSION formula: a part of analysis involves identifying the higher cause, the passion, that drives us;*
- *Lifetime FULFILMENT formula: the virtues that make one invincible also lead to a life of fulfilment;*
- *Lifetime LEARNING formula: strategy involves a never-ending process of learning, evaluation and continuous improvement;*
- *Lifetime EXCELLENCE formula: excellence is not a one-off achievement but a continuous cycle of excellence upon excellence.*

*In the second section of this book, we look at Benjamin Franklin's life from the perspective of PRAISE™ to discover the extent to which he had applied similar principles in order to become the great man that he was.*

“...my desire being  
to gain in knowledge  
at the same time that  
I improv'd in virtue.”



## *PRIZEDREAM*

*The Prizedream is a strong motivator. It is a desire so strong that a person will do whatever it takes to attain it. He will work hard, make sacrifices and focus his whole energy.*

*This is the first and most important component of PRAISE™. It is the beginning of change. All change begins with a vision. Without this vision – of something different, something better – we will all be still doing the same things in the same way; we will still be living in the stone age.*

*Change is the way to progress. We are able to travel faster and farther than a horse can take us because men dreamed of cars and bullet trains. But those would not take us to the moon, or Mars, and beyond. More dreams, and more changes, were needed.*

*Throughout history, the only constant has been change. And changes always followed Prizedreams. Thus, the Prizedream provides us with a lifetime CHANGE formula.*

Benjamin Franklin was driven throughout his life by a simple Prizedream – to improve himself and to help others. In his own words: *my desire being to gain in knowledge at the same time that I improv'd in virtue.*

Many of us may have similar wishes – to improve ourselves and help others. Yet those are mere wishes.

Franklin had his wishes too: *a hankering for the sea.* He grew up near the sea and learnt to swim well from a young age.

His first invention, at the age of 11, was a set of swim fins to help him swim better. However, he did not put great effort to pursue this hankering, which gradually faded into the background of his life.

It surfaced briefly during Franklin's first visit to London, when he taught two friends to swim and demonstrated his swimming skills – both on and under water – to the delight and surprise of onlookers. Franklin even briefly considered becoming a swimming instructor. But he never seriously pursued swimming or a career at sea.

*Energy and  
persistence  
conquer  
all things*



In his other pursuits, however, Franklin put in tremendous effort, hard work and sacrifices. This was what turned his wishes into Prizedreams. At different stages of his life, Franklin's desire to improve himself and help others translated into more specific Prizedreams:

- When he was young, his Prizedream was to improve his writing skill and later, to improve his knowledge;
- When he worked as a printer and later ran his own printing and publishing business, his Prizedream was to do his work well and make his business succeed;
- When he began to study about electricity, his Prizedream was to discover as much as he could about it;
- Later, his Prizedream was to improve the life of his fellow citizens and he achieved this by initiating a number of useful public projects;

- Finally, his Prizedream was to improve the lives of all Americans, by fighting for independence from British rule.

To achieve his Prizedream of becoming a good writer of the English language, Franklin earnestly studied examples of good writing, and then tried to re-create and improve upon them.

Throughout his life, Franklin devoted his energy to the pursuit of knowledge. He always sought friends who were learned and able to engage him in debates. When he was a child, he befriended John Collins, whom Franklin described as *another bookish lad in the town*. When he was 21, he formed a society called the Junto, a group of young men who met weekly for *self-improvement, study, mutual aid, and conviviality*.

The group lasted 40 years, which showed the extent of their dedication. Through the Junto, Franklin set up a library and this gave him more opportunities for learning. Later, he established the American Philosophical Society and began to correspond with learned men of other countries.

In his business, Franklin worked hard to acquire a good reputation and offer what we nowadays call ‘customer satisfaction’. He also constantly thought up new ideas and new projects to improve his business – publishing a newspaper and an almanac, selling stationery and books, helping other printers in the colonies to set up and then taking a share of their profits, and so on.

When Franklin began to study electricity, he corresponded regularly with other scientists, particularly Mr P Collinson, who was a Fellow of the Royal Society of London. It was Collinson

who first presented him with a glass tube with instructions on how to perform various electricity experiments with it.

Franklin never stopped learning. Nor did he allow old age, a failing eyesight and an ailing body to deter him. When he was around 78 to 80, Franklin invented bifocal lenses as well as a 'long arm' to take books from high shelves. He never stopped pursuing knowledge.

He never stopped seeking to improve the lives of others and was constantly initiating public projects. These included a library, an academy for higher education, fire brigade, paved roads, and so on. He also helped a doctor friend develop a public hospital.

Franklin's biggest Prizedream was independence for the American colonies, which eventually became the United States of America. Here again, Franklin showed himself ready and willing to do whatever it took to make that Prizedream come true.

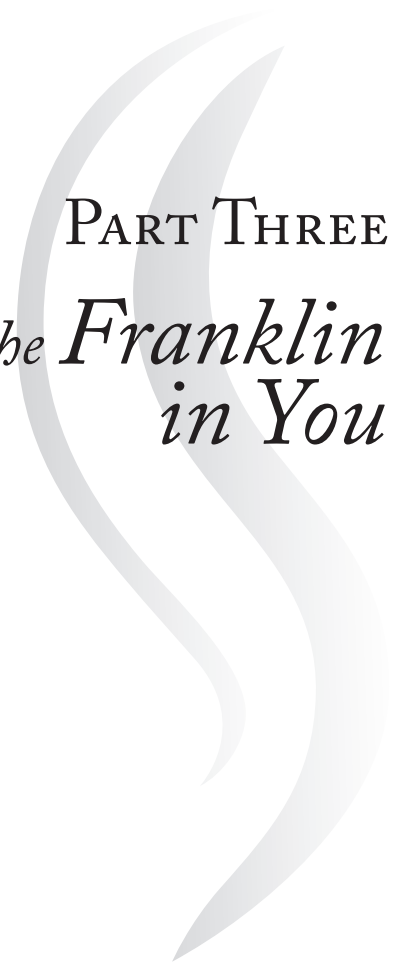
Initially, this was not his dream. In 1764, Franklin had gone to England merely to present a petition to King George III, asking the King to assume control over the colony of Pennsylvania, as the people there were unhappy with the conduct of their governor. Franklin expected to spend at most six months there. But when he arrived in England, he found the King uninterested in the affairs of the colonies.

Later when the British Parliament imposed unfavourable measures against the colonies, such as the Stamp Act, Franklin stayed on to fight for American interests. He ended up staying in England for 10 years. As the relationship between Britain and the colonies deteriorated, the desire for independence strengthened.

Franklin had to endure great humiliation in his fights against the British, who levelled false and ridiculous charges against him. He responded by keeping silent, refusing to answer any of the charges.

The biggest sacrifice Franklin made during this period was his separation from his family. When his wife passed away in December 1774, Franklin did not know it until several months later.

Such setbacks, however, never deterred him from continually pursuing his Prizedream – to improve himself and to help others.



PART THREE  
*The Franklin  
in You*

“*To succeed, jump as quickly at opportunity as you do at conclusions.*”



# 2005

The Kyoto Pact on global warming went into force, seven years after it was negotiated.

China and Taiwan resumed direct air services after 56 years.

Bextra, a pain-killer drug for arthritis sufferers, was withdrawn following the 2004 withdrawal of a similar drug, Vioxx.

Pope John Paul II died at age 84. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger of Germany succeeded him as Pope Benedict XVI.

Prince Charles of Wales married Camilla Parker Bowles.

Pop star Michael Jackson was found not guilty of child molestation.

Britain banned fox hunting, to the protest of half a million people.

German supermarket chain Edeka enabled payments by scanning the fingerprints of customers, without using cash or credit cards.

Hurricane Katrina devastated the US city of New Orleans, killing over 1,300 people and leaving over a million people homeless.

*As Americans begin celebrating the 300<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Benjamin Franklin on 17 January 2006, a Singaporean writer is inspired to write this book.*

*There are two ways* to respond to Benjamin Franklin's life story.

One way is to think of all the reasons why we cannot succeed like him. He was probably born a genius, his father encouraged him in the pursuit of knowledge, he lived in a different era (when life was less stressful), he was lucky...

How valid are these reasons? If you think that Franklin was blessed with the genes of a genius, where did he get them from?

None of Franklin's ancestors were outstanding in their lives and careers. His ancestors lived in Ecton, Northamptonshire, in England for at least 300 years and, up till the time of his grandfather, Thomas, they carried on the trade of blacksmiths.

Franklin's father, Josiah, became a candle and soap maker when he moved to New England, America, around 1682. He was a learned man who owned a small library and who enjoyed having intelligent conversations with friends and neighbours at the dining table.

Only Franklin's eldest uncle, Thomas (named after his grandfather), had achievements similar to his. Franklin wrote:

*Thomas was bred a smith under his father; but, being ingenious, and encouraged in learning (as all my brothers were)... he qualified himself for the business of scrivener<sup>1</sup>; became a considerable man in the county; was a chief mover of all public-spirited undertakings for the county or town of Northampton, and his own village, of which many instances were related of him; and much taken notice of and patronized by the then Lord Halifax.*

Franklin mentioned that all his brothers were encouraged in learning. In particular, his brother, James, ran a printing business and published a successful newspaper in Boston. James also had some ingenious men among his friends.

Franklin's eldest son, William, became the Governor of New Jersey. But none of the Franklin family members – not his ancestors, his siblings or his children – came close to achieving the same level of success and excellence as he did.

If you think that Franklin was blessed with natural advantages, think again. He had limited education and very limited access to books. Today, even the average school drop-out has more years of schooling than Franklin. If the person lives in a city, he or she would have free or low-cost access to hundreds of thousands of books.

*Having been  
poor is no  
shame. Being  
ashamed  
of it is.*



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<sup>1</sup> A scrivener was a person employed to make written copies of manuscripts and documents.

With the Internet, our access to knowledge and information is greater than ever before. We are, in many ways, infinitely more fortunate than Franklin who lived some 300 years ago.

Franklin started his life pretty much an ordinary person. He was playful and he did ‘naughty’ things like take some stones meant for building a house to construct a wharf where he and his friends could catch fish.

Franklin did well in school. He was promoted to the second year before he completed the first, so that he could go on to the third year after that. But his family could not afford his education. He left school before the year was up, and studied another year in a private school – where he failed in arithmetic – before he stopped schooling completely.

Franklin was also defiant as a young boy. He did not like working in his father’s soap and candle business, he resisted binding himself to work for his brother and, even when he finally signed to work for his brother till 21, he broke his bond and ran away at 17.

*Search others  
for their virtues,  
thyself for  
thy vices.*



In many ways, Franklin was no different from any of us.

The point is not to compare. When we look at others, they will always be better off than us in some ways, worse off in others and yet similar in many ways.

The point is not even to strive to be like others. There is – and can be – only one Benjamin Franklin. Everyone is unique. Each of

us has our own gifts, talents and abilities. If you seek to be someone else, you will fail because you are not that someone else.

An appropriate response to an outstanding personality like Benjamin Franklin would be to be inspired – inspired to achieve similar levels of success and excellence.

Franklin was able to transform himself from an ordinary person into someone who achieved extraordinary success and excellence.

There is no secret. Franklin did it by having a Prizedream and working hard for it. He lived by his own personal rules, such as being different and taking control of his life situations. He took advantage of opportunities that passed his way; he created opportunities by networking with other learned individuals.

Franklin cultivated many of the qualities of a leader, such as wisdom, sincerity, strictness and benevolence, and he constantly sought to reduce his character weaknesses. He devised strategies to turn setbacks into advantages. He worked hard for success until it became his habit and part of his character; he achieved cycle after cycle of success unlimited.

These are not extraordinary measures. They are ordinary things that you and I can do.

There is a PRAISE™ Champion in each and every one of us, just as there was one in Benjamin Franklin. What Franklin did was merely to nourish that PRAISE™ Champion and allow it to emerge and manifest itself in his life. Many people have done the same. You can do it too.

This is not to say that it will be easy.

Just as there is a PRAISE™ Champion inside us, there is also a ‘robber’ inside us who would deny us our potential for success and greatness.

Only a fine line separates the robber from the Champion. If you can break through that fine line, you will find hidden treasures inside you. Once you unlock your hidden potential, you will be able to break away from mediocrity and conformity to lead yourself to achieve your own unique vision.

You and only you are the master of your own destiny. You need to find your self-esteem, which will give you enthusiasm and energy, to turn your life around.

If we are not yet successful, not yet achieving excellence, it is because this robber had been ruling our lives all along. It is not easy to remove this robber right away, because the robber may be very deeply entrenched in our daily lives.

*Little strokes  
fell great oaks.*



Like many people, I was once ruled by this robber. I was very, very far from achieving success and excellence. In a small way, I was like Franklin too – I failed my arithmetic when I was in primary school.

But because I had a strong desire to excel, I slowly climbed out of my failure and misery. I changed my environment and, instead of being surrounded by others who were equal failures, I began to surround myself with friends who were able to help me, and

genuine in wanting to do so. My network of friends was still far from Franklin's networks in the Junto and the American Philosophical Society. But at least I was moving in the same direction.

This is the least you can do – move in the same direction.

I don't believe in making false promises, and telling you that just because you have read this book, you can, overnight, become an extraordinary success like Benjamin Franklin. Perhaps some of you can. But for most of us, it is going to take some time.

What's important is that you make a start. Start by aiming for small successes.

From childhood, I grew up with vulgarities spewing from my mouth. One day, when I was in my early teens, I decided to stop. I told my friends that I would pay them five cents for every vulgar word uttered.

Five cents may not seem like a lot of money, but for me at that time, it was. My family was poor and I did not have much pocket money for school. If I happened to utter a vulgar word in the presence of a group of friends, I could lose most of my pocket allowance. I ended up owing my friends several dollars. Eventually, I stopped my vulgarities. Slowly, I cleared my debts.

That was one of my early, small successes. It gave me the confidence that I could conquer my weaknesses. It led to bigger successes later in life. And when I developed PRAISE™ as a personal life skills model at age 26, I went on to greater achievements and higher levels of excellence.

PRAISE™ will help you get out of mediocrity and conformity to lead yourself to accomplish your own unique vision by unlocking your hidden potential. It consists of the following steps:

1. Set the **Prizedream**. This will initiate the process of change and lead you to discover a lifetime **CHANGE** formula.
2. Lay the **Rules**. When you are guided by your own internal rules, you learn to think out of the box. This gives you a lifetime **CREATIVITY** formula.
3. Do the **Analysis**. Examine the factors that are for or against you and identify the higher cause that drives you. This is your lifetime **PASSION** formula.
4. Think **Invincible**. Cultivate the winning attitude and the virtues that lead to invincibility. These virtues provide you with a lifetime **FULFILMENT** formula.
5. Execute the **Strategies**. Learn from your failures, learn how to turn setbacks into opportunities, and weaknesses into strengths. This is an on-going process that equips you with a lifetime **LEARNING** formula for continuous improvement.
6. Achieve **Excellence**. Achieve it not once or twice, but over and over again in a cycle of success unlimited. Acquire a lifetime **EXCELLENCE** formula.

PRAISE™ has helped me achieve excellence and success for more than 20 years, in different facets of my life – studies, examinations, career and entrepreneurship. It also helped me overcome other life's challenges, such as when I renovated my house, or decided recently to climb Mount Sinai, the 'Mountain of Moses'. More recently, PRAISE™ enabled me to embark on a new adventure to become

a writer and publisher. PRAISE™ transformed my rough life into a rich life.

PRAISE™ is a personal life skills model that has been subconsciously adopted by great men and women, both historical and contemporary. Benjamin Franklin is just one of many such persons, whom I call PRAISE™ champions.

My future books will feature other masters of greatness such as Alexander the Great, Abraham Lincoln, Genghis Khan, Confucius, Mahatma Gandhi, Konosuke Matsushita, Mother Teresa, Sun Yat Sen, Florence Nightingale, Thomas Edison... and others.

My wish is to inspire you to draw out the PRAISE™ champion that dwells inside you. And that you might inspire others to do the same. Let's inspire each other!

PRAISE™ is simple, yet powerful.

Use it. Or miss it. The choice is yours.

*Think. Reflect. Engage.*

“*A place for everything.  
Everything in place.*”

