

The article has been published in The Nation on February 13, 2007

Sigve Brekke
sigve@dtac.co.th

“Things turn out the best for the people who make the best of the way things turn out” - John Wooden

I believe in fate but never let it dictate my destiny.

To be born rich or poor, for instance, is entirely based on fate but how to lead our lives thereafter is purely up to us.

I myself wasn't born with a golden spoon in my mouth. I grew up on a small sheep farm in Norway. Not until I was 20 did I step into a cinema, but I never saw these as representing my inferiority. I never blame my luck either. I am actually quite happy with the environment I grew up in, the hard work I have done, the fact that I was one of the children from upcountry, and the job and life I have chosen by myself.

I think life is a learning process. We learn everyday how to make today the most memorable, learn not to forego opportunities in life, and learn to look things on the bright side, whatever our situation.

A story was told a long time ago that a shoe company in the U.S. sent two salesmen to survey the market in Africa. The first one was very frustrated, moaning and whining to his friends about why on earth the company had to pick Africa as a new prospect. It was so far way and bloody hot, he complained. The other salesman, however, took up his new assignment with cheerful smile. He rushed back home to pack his bag, ready to give it a go.

Upon arrival, the unhappy salesman spent only half an hour before sending a telegraph back to the head office, saying “Forget about Africa”. There was no potential in this part of the world where everyone was walking around barefoot. The other salesman, who had disappeared for one day, wrote back to the head office, urging them to set up a budget for this new mark right away. He reasoned that the place had a huge potential for growth. He had also given away free pairs of shoes to some local people to check the reactions. The people just loved the shoes but they wanted them made of more durable materials at a lower price.

I don't need to tell you whose proposal was chosen by the company, but the more important point of this story is that if we have good attitudes, we can see opportunities that others don't. Complaining wouldn't help to make anything better for us.

As we often hear, life is not always a bed of roses. There are obstacles and bumpy roads. If things don't turn out the way we hope, don't waste time blaming others; just stay focused on how you can turn the crisis into an opportunity.

People often ask me what kind of planning I did to turn myself from a rural kid into the person I am today. I simply stick to my old answers. I don't like planning far ahead. What I think helps me most is my positive thinking. Also, I never give up on anything. Whenever there is a chance to learn or try a new thing, I always take it. Similar to what the second salesman did, I guess. Just be open-minded to new challenges. Other people may not see any potential in it, but if we think differently, and if we try our best, we will find a lot of new potential lying beneath.

So don't shield yourself from new opportunities by being pessimistic. If you miss the target, don't lose your heart. Sit back and think carefully how to make the most out of the situation. Who knows? The worst nightmare may turn out not as bad as we thought.