

**FROM ACORNS TO OAK TREES:  
Personal Growth from Inner City roots**

*Practical Guide To Help You Achieve Success In Your Life,  
Your Career And For Your Local Community!*

# **‘PERSONAL SUCCESS - AN INNER CITY PERSPECTIVE’**

Written by: Joel Graham-Blake

*"Inspiring, empowering and genuinely cares about people"*

**Ruth Badger, MD, Ruth Badger Consultancy**

*"Joel Graham-Blake, MD shows throughout all his work,  
professionalism and integrity that is sometimes hard to find.*

*He lives what he speaks"*

**Dr Iona Jones, Founder,  
Imagine Associates**

*"Joel is an entrepreneur with a social conscience,  
who inspires others to realise their own potential"*

**Aaron Reid, Executive Director,  
Birmingham Professional Divercity**

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**Dedications:**

This e-book is dedicated to the following people (you know who you are):

D, for the cheeky little smile and the unconditional love that you give me, every single day of my life.

Lolly for being there during the dark days and refusal to leave my side no matter what happened.

Antz for not being just another youth statistic and inspiring me with your passion for the arts.

Yegi for the love, strength, determination and sense of dedication that you give me.

Lloydyman, for empowering me to be myself no matter what people say, do or think and for helping me understand the importance of wearing a good suit!

You all have had a positive influence in my life and I shall never forget it, now and forever.

Joel x

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**Foreword:**

I wrote this e-book, initially, out of sheer frustration.

Frustration because I try so hard to achieve my goals and find people enjoy putting obstacles before me that test my patience, passion and commitment, every single day.

Frustrations because I consistently find myself in danger of losing the things that are most important to me, yet I refuse to douse the fire that rages inside me.

Frustration because I see others achieving success in ways that go against my morals and values yet I can see the simplicity in what they do and know how I would do it better.

However, the biggest frustration is that I can see PEOPLE IN MY COMMUNITY DYING. Mentally, spiritually and physically.

I see young people with no care for tomorrow because they don't even know if they will be alive to see it; I see children having children and expecting life to give them what they need to survive, but not having the chance to grow individually; I see parents failing their children because they lack the ability to even take care of themselves yet have more children than they can cater for...the list goes on.

Furthermore, we live in a system where the colour of your skin, the accent of your speech, the postcode where you live, the age that you are and the choices that you make, all cloud the perception that people have of you, whether it is politically correct or not.

Through this e-book, I would like to share my understanding of the lessons taught by the School of Life, with you.

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My aim is for you to think about who you are, where you have come from, where you are going and to identify how you are going to get there.

I have detailed **FOUR KEY STEPS** that can help you achieve success, in whatever way that means to you.

My insights are based on my life experiences of growing up as an inner city kid with a dream.

I encourage you to:

Be the person that you are destined you to be – the influences in your life condition your character and personality. Use them wisely.

Learn how to develop yourself within your organization – your personal commitment will determine the success of your business.

Keep open minded at all times – helping the community or others is not about handouts or charity. It is about inclusion, warts and all.

With the economic climate causing people to lose their jobs and homes, with countries at war, with the onslaught of climate change amongst many other important factors in our lives, we have to create a change.

But that change must start from each and every one of us, or it will never come.

I hope my humble words inspire you to make the right choices, choices that bring you success.

Joel x

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**Chapter 1 - Seed upon the ground**

**Sacrifice** - *n giving something up; making an offering*

People often say that you must be grateful for what you have. That you must think about others who would give their right arm to be in your position. But is that strictly true?

Just because you may have a little bit more (not necessarily money I must add) than others does not automatically mean that you are better off. What it does force you to do, is analyse what is of most importance to you and more importantly, why?

For example: There are people in the world who live on less than 1dollar per day, yet they have a family structure that gives them a sense of belonging and love, enabling all to survive and work together to make life better.

There are also people in the world who live on more than 1000 pounds a day who would give away all their money and assets to have the love and the security of a family around them.

There are even those in the middle, who on the surface, seem to have everything in order. But they make sure you don't see that they have to scrape together money for electric and gas tokens or put £2.00 petrol in their car daily because their last ten-pound has to stretch!

Having a huge pile of money and having none at all is irrelevant unless you make it relevant - icons from Warren Buffet to Gandhi alone teach us that. Money is just a means of exchange that is worthless until you place a particular level of value on it.

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The crucial thing to remember is that the little things have a bearing on your mental ability to survive and become successful.

It is easier to react against larger problems but it is the build up of little things that keep chipping away at your sanity, which can send you over the edge.

**Self Analysis:**

The question to ask yourself is:

- **What is most important to you RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW and what will you sacrifice to get it?**

But hold your horses! Before you grab a piece of A4 paper and start listing your needs, desires and all the things that you feel you deserve, there are a few things that you need to consider.

**Background**

- What are the most positive things that you remember about your background or organisation?
- What are the most negative things that you remember about your background or organisation?
- What impact will those things have your ability to move forward?

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Conditioning

- How has your background or work culture conditioned the way you think, act and feel?
- What do you need to change / release / get rid off?
- How are you going to do that?
- Who will feel the impact of your decision/s?

**The Power of Sacrifice**

There is great power in taking decisive action but there are times when you may feel that you can't. The world seems against you and no matter which way you look, there is no way out.

It is not a nice place to be in, but it is in those times where you will be able to build personal strength and an awareness of what you can really achieve - fighting against adversity makes you stronger!

The key is to:

- analyse the consequences that will arise from the sacrifices that you make
- focus on dealing with them accordingly

This will result in a build up of your self-esteem and motivation, so remember that sacrifices make us stronger even when we feel weaker!

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**Chapter Two - Sapling**

**Self-belief** - *self (prefix) - of oneself or itself; belief (n) principle accepted as true, often without proof*

'Hero' is in my opinion, one of the greatest songs ever written.

If you put her little annoyances to one side, just for the moment, it would be hard to argue that Mariah Carey has sung a song better than that, ever.

Why? Because it epitomises the very essence of our desire, as humans to achieve whatever we can conceive in our minds.

It is one of those songs that you are afraid to listen to because it makes you feel uplifted about what you are going to do but disappointed with yourself about the things you have not done, simultaneously!

Also, I would be lying if I said that I have never, ever wanted to cry whenever I heard it...I won't tell nobody but I bet you have felt the same? Don't worry; it's our little secret!

*But what is self-belief?*

Self-belief is the ability to have supreme confidence to achieve whatever goal you wish, overcoming every hurdle, obstacle and challenge that is in your way.

It is created by understanding oneself to the point where you have an emotional attachment that cannot be broken by anyone or anything; when you feel at peace but invincible at the same time.

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It is when you have conquered your fears and forgave those who have trespassed against you, even though you let them lead you into temptation....read the last line again, and be honest, ok?

It is a combination of confidence, fear, influence and an understanding of why you have self-belief or want it.

*Self belief is having the strength, courage, bravery and fearlessness to tell the man dem round your endz that ur not into knife and gun crime anymore cos life is too short or YOU HAVE REALISED THAT YOU HAVE A LIFE THAT YOU WANT TO LIVE, u get me, blood!*

Don't get me wrong. I know it is difficult to see life outside of the four walls that you are used to. It is even more difficult when that is the only life that you, your family, your friends, and your work colleagues have ever known - the vicious circle goes around again and again and again and you feel it will never stop.

But you are unique and that means you have choices. Every human being is entitled to that even if the consequences will cause harm and destruction. Are you prepared to walk through the fire to reach the stillness of the sea that lies in the distance?

Close your eyes. Can you feel the cool water of satisfaction lapping at your feet, the sunshine of hope and love beaming down on your face? How does it make you feel? Is it worth all the pain and sacrifice?

You must make the first step. Even if you need someone with you as you take your foot forward, you have to take that step.

No matter what, change will not come unless you TAKE ACTION!

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**Self - Analysis:**

Motivation

- What are the things that you know you can achieve?
- Why do you believe you can achieve them?
- What are the negatives things that you will change?
- What are the positives that you will bring into your situation?

Support

- Every likes to think that they don't need anyone to help them get what they want but who can you really rely on, trust, believe in?
- How are the frenemies\* that you need to distance yourself away from?

Mentorship

- Who can help to guide you in achieving success?
- How are you going to gain their support?
- Are you mentally prepared to receive their support?

\* Frenemies – people who you trust, but then turn on you when you least expect it.

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**Chapter Three - Trunk**

**Commitment - *(n) dedication to a cause***

'I want to lose weight' is not a commitment. 'I want to stop smoking' is not a commitment.

'I will..(Whatever it is)...because..(Whatever your reason) by....(goal end)' is a commitment.

We live in a society that loves to dictate and influence who and what we are. The worst thing is that we know it, still get sucked into it and complain when things are not how we want them to be.

Are we our own worst enemies because of that? Are we not the hypocrites that we often claim others to be?

No, we are not. We just believe we are, and then make the type of statements and promises that we like to badge as commitments but which are really 'comforters'. We believe that if we say the right things to ourselves often enough, it will happen.

That is why it is important to know the difference and understand why you get the same results all the time. Anything can happen if you commit to whatever it is you say that you want and actually do something tangible about it.

If I asked you to go onto the internet and research people in history who you regard as role models, I guarantee that you would say that you admire them because they refused to waver their commitment to the task, cause or vision that they had set for themselves, regardless of the struggles and obstacles that came their way.

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Furthermore, I would also guarantee that the end target was achieved, even if it was not by them.

Do the names Martin Luther King and Barack Obama ring a bell?

I use that example not because a man of colour is in the White House, but that a man of multiple ethnic origins is in the White House. Such is the power of commitment and the desire for unity!

But let me give you a word of warning about Commitment.

The reason why someone commits to something is easily influenced by the:

- Perception of the person creating it
- The perception of the person/s affected by it
- The overall context that has been identified

It is a fine line between good and evil, and unfortunately, we do have people in the world who are more than happy to cross it.

Some people use the essence of commitment to justify the negative action that they take and thus, it makes sense to them.

For example: A young person who suffers from no self-esteem, has no positive role models, no real formal education or qualifications, has a criminal record, lives in an environment of drugs, violence and a wide range of negativity, may be expected by society as a whole, to fail in anything positive that he/she may try to achieve.

However, that young person would also be the most astute, sharpest, naturally intelligent, goal-orientated and driven person you would ever meet. Why?

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Because the cards that life has dealt them, has made sure that they have to be, in order to eat, to live, to survive.

The problem is that the young person may use their abilities as a mechanism of personal battle, living with a me against the world mentality, which undermines their progress.

They become consciously committed to doing this because that is all they can base their life upon therefore justification for negative action becomes automatic.

Society then states that these negative actions must be eliminated, for the protection of the wider society.

However, I don't agree with the punishment of an individual, without solving the issues that created the environment that has conditioned them negatively.

Nourish the roots not the branches, Great Britain PLC!

*In my humble opinion, we have very powerful people in our society that find it difficult to imagine what it is like to live a day in the life of people in our communities and use academic theory and their position, to make sure they don't have to.*

*Reminds me of a baby with a favourite blanket – a false sense of security because they feel vulnerable.*

*We also have people who want to use their position and power to understand what it is like for people in our communities, but don't know how or where to go for the support they need to do this.*

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**The true question that I often ponder over is:**

**How long does it really take to change  
someone else's life, for the better?**

Everyone is entitled to equal opportunities in this life but sometimes it feels as though the gap between the haves and have-not's is getting bigger and bigger.

When people feel as though they have no opportunity, they make the choices that they feel is right for them – some out of desperation, some out of hope, others because they just want to.

What worries me is that people may not say what they want or need, but expect it to come to them. If not, they take it!

The methods they use to get what you want, is the deciding factor between negative punishment and positive success. However, you forget the pain of feeling sorry for yourself because your ego, desire or plain stupidity got the better of you.

On the other hand, reaping the rewards of your endeavours is an uplifting experience, even in small doses.

The feeling of contentment and empowerment that you gain from positive results makes you feel as if you are the king or queen of the world; you find yourself spreading love to others in ways that shock both you and them!

Don't let the pressures of life stop you believing in who you are and what you will become. You are a star that creates its own shine and no one should ever take that away from you.

You have one life, so live it well with honour and integrity.

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**Self – Analysis:**

Drive

- What makes you wake up in the morning, on a natural high and ready to overcome any hurdle in your life or work?
- How can you magnify that feeling for yourself? For others?
- How will you monitor your progress – benchmarks, milestones?

Passion

- You ever had that feeling of butterflies in your stomach but it excites rather than make you nervous?
- What would it be like to have that feeling every second of your life?
- How can you create the passion to ensure that you stay committed to achieving your vision of success?

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**Chapter Four - Oak Tree**

**Action** - *(n) process of doing something*

*Welcome to the beginning, of the rest of your life!*

**Let me tell you a story:**

Once upon a time, a weary traveller was walking up a steep hill, on a dark stormy night. Soon, he came to a cave that offered him some well-needed shelter. He climbed up and nestled himself into the cave, and started looking for materials to make a fire for the night.

As he began to build himself a fire out of dry sticks, he noticed a glint out of the corner of his eye. As the fire rose, the flames began to shed light into the cave. As he looked on the ground, he saw a single sack full of rubies, diamonds and coins.

As he looked more into the cave, he noticed a man fast asleep with a long grey beard dressed in rags, with cuts and bruises upon his face.

The traveller walked over to him and nudged him gently. As the man awoke, the traveller asked his name. 'I am The King of Success' he said, as he tried to pull his torn rags around his body.

The traveller looked him up and down, looked at all the jewels, and began scratching his head, confused and bewildered.

'If you are the King of Success' asked the traveller, 'then why are you here, amongst all these riches yet you do not present yourself as a King?'

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The King explained that he was involved in a vicious battle and that he had fled with what he was wearing and the one bag of jewels. Amazed by this story, the traveller asked how he could help.

The King simply replied 'I'm tired, my son. I've fought for so long to become the person that I am. But in all my years, I have learnt but only one true lesson.

He beckoned the traveller to come closer. 'Becoming King is a battle' he said 'but maintaining your kingdom is the real war'.

And with those final words, he took his last breath and was gone forever.

**Conclusion:**

Achieving success in your life, business or community requires teamwork, knowledge, empowerment and support in order to develop the ability to make the right sacrifices, to grow and stay committed to the vision that has been identified.

But like an oak tree, once you have achieved success, you have to branch out and grow in many different ways to become stronger. By doing so, you give others the shelter through your life and experiences, to achieve their own vision of success.

Take pride in who and what you are. Love the life that you lead. Keep your inner circle close and transparent. Refuse to accept the mental negativity that can undermine your power.

I thank you for taking the time to read my eBook. I wish you the best of success, in whatever shape or form that means to you.

Joel x

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**About the author:**



Joel Graham-Blake was born on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 1980 in Birmingham, United Kingdom.

As the product of a single family home, he learnt from an early age that his life was not limited by what he saw and experienced around him but by what his mind could conceive.

Having overcome many trials and obstacles his own life, he has become a successful entrepreneur, youth mentor, motivational and public speaker and guest lecturer at various UK business schools.

He currently works as an Executive Business Coach and Management Consultant:

- Helping Board Level Directors and Senior Managers, to develop innovative ways of staying in front of their competition.
- Giving organisations practical knowledge on how to engage more proactively with local communities.

However, he has never lost his passion for his community and young people.

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He has over 10 years experience as a Youth Development Consultant and has helped many young people, from all walks of life, to overcome negative barriers and nurture their own potential.

He also works as a Facilitator for the 14-16 Prince of Fellowship Programme and supports voluntary sector organisations, offering both time and expertise in helping them to achieve their aims.

In his spare time, he works in a voluntary capacity as:

- Advisory Board Member for Career Academies UK
- Guardian of the Edgbaston Foundation
- Committee Member for the Inner City Entrepreneur Network
- Member of Birmingham & Solihull Business Education Forum

He was nominated as Young Professional of the Year 2006 in his region, Urban Dreams Award Winner 2006, Young Entrepreneur of the Year 2007 (Black Enterprise Awards) and has been profiled in both local and national media.

In his own words, he states:

***'I dedicate my life to helping others enhance their own quality of life, generate personal success for themselves and their families whilst empowering people they know, positively.***

***In that way, we all grow as one and never lose our sense of humility and passion for achieving our goals.***

***Only then, can we truly appreciate the struggles that form our characters, our lives and our communities.'***

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