

**IF YOU WANT TO GET AHEAD GET A .....**

Book! How many of you saw the recent Will Smith movie 'The Pursuit of Happyness', based on the true story of a poor, black American who lifts himself up from poverty to affluence through sheer hard work and determination? It's an age-old desire – the Cinderella story, from rags to riches, living the dream, fulfilling the promise. And wouldn't we all like to know the secret of success?

So when someone writes a book promising us just that, let's face it, we are naturally intrigued. And when he calls that book *The Secret* we're totally hooked – Something in the human psyche energizes us with the mention of the 's' word. – we want to know more – have to know more. It's on a need-to-know basis - not for public consumption and somehow we feel that if we become privy to *The Secret* then we will be more empowered. No wonder then that the book is catapulting its way up the sale chart and is becoming a best seller.

In the past few weeks I've come across a number of people who are modifying their life after reading *The Secret* or for the less studious having watched the DVD version – which saves you having to really understand the theory, offering an even shorter cut to understanding the secret of success and happiness.

Of course this is not the first self-help book to have been written but apparently this one is way more than that – according to the official website it **is** *The Secret* to everything - unlimited joy, health, money, relationships, love, youth: everything you have ever wanted. The website is designed to increase the sense of intrigue with even a section entitled Top Secret – if I didn't know any better I would have thought I had entered the Dungeons and Dragons website by mistake.

Anyway, having heard of its life-changing wonders from so many people, all within a short space of time, I decided to go out and buy the book so that I too could be let in on the secret and thus live a happier, more fulfilled and more successful life. I just had to know the secret but now that I do must admit that I'm a tad disappointed – nothing really new at all – just the usual 'success through self-help' literature – differently packaged.

And now that it is on the best-seller list it must be the world's worst-kept secret anyway so I don't feel guilty about revealing all - the big 'thing' with *The Secret* is the 'law of attraction' principle. This posits that people's feelings and thoughts attract real events in the world into their lives; from the workings of the cosmos to interactions among individuals in their physical, emotional, and professional affairs. It's all a bit too simplistic for me - I don't proclaim to understand the universe and how it works but I just thought it was the power of positive thinking revisited. The book gave me the distinct impression that all you have to do is create a wish list of what you want; visualize it and abracadabra, the universe delivers.

I have read Eckart Tolle, Scott Peck, Stephen Covey, Brandon Bays and even Dale Carnegie whose wonderful lessons on how to find success include "How to Win Friends and Influence People and How to Stop Worrying and Start Living or was it How to Start Living and Stop Worrying...whatever!

Success changes through the ages - clearly. When Carnegie wrote he punted what was called the personality ethic - which was rather shallow as it did not take into account intent and was quite manipulative. A basic message was that if you want someone to like you - compliment them. I mean, how shallow is that, both as a life-changing philosophy and as a personality trait? We all know people who lack sincerity but are very good at telling you what they think you want to hear. However, your intuitive little inner professor will warn you and you will not be taken in. There were many messages Carnegie put forward but this example gives you the general flavour - *The Sycophants Steps to Success or You Too Can Toady Your Way To The Top*. Covey dismissed this thinking by punting the character ethic, saying that finding real meaning in life meant going back to the old-fashioned values of character and integrity and following natural principals.

Tolle takes us further, encouraging us to explore and awaken the spiritual dimension in one's life, find inner peace, increased joy and more harmonious relationships. In his new book he recounts from the Bible the Gospel story of Mary and Martha. Jesus says to Martha, "You are anxious and troubled about many things, but only one thing is needful." And the answer is spiritual awakening Eckart, too, says "Humanity now, perhaps more than in any previous time, has an opportunity to create a new, saner, more loving world. This will involve a radical inner leap from the current egoist consciousness to an entirely new one."

Personally I think this search for the Holy Grail of health, wealth and happiness is the new Christianity for the nouveau riche - you only have to look at the official websites to appreciate that if Christianity is to stand its ground and survive into the future it's going to have to get a better marketing manager than the one currently employed at the Vatican! John Lennon caused outrage in the sixties when he commented that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus but I wonder which sold more last year - the Bible or the Da Vinci Code? The Bible is the ultimate spiritual self-help book but Dan Brown promised to let us into the best-kept religious secret of all time and didn't we buy into it!

I can't help thinking that there is something fundamentally flawed though. Success books are often like motivational seminars - a quick high followed by the usual downer when you get back to reality. A friend of mine summed it up the other day when I asked him if he was using the principals of *The Secret* - "only when I need it", was his enigmatic reply. I think that's true for all the people who spend their entire life looking for life's answers. They devour book after book hoping to find the quick fix, the magic pill, the panacea for happiness but they don't want to know what it really boils down to .

You see if you read between the lines of all success literature the real secret lies in diligence, hard work and consistency - and being all of this day in, day out. It is not easy. For me Stephen Covey encapsulates it perfectly when he says the difference between successful people and unsuccessful people is that successful people do the things that unsuccessful people don't want to do. They don't particularly like doing it either but their dislike is subservient to their desire to succeed.

So who's right? Tolle, Bays, Covey? Is it personality, character or spiritual awakening? Who cares - they are all making a fortune from their version, their theory. Perhaps the real secret to success is writing self-help books and making megabucks from royalties and spin-offs? So my advice is to tread carefully looking for success in a book when what you're really doing buying it is contributing greatly to someone else's!

