

**UNLOCK THE CODE TO GRADUATION
WITH JUST 1 CUP OF COFFEE**

SURVIVE

MEDSCHOOL

UNSCATHED



MICHAEL LEE

SURVIVE MEDSCHOOL UNSCATHED

(Unlock the Code to Graduation with just 1 Cup of Coffee)

by Michael Lee

Survive MedSchool Unscathed

Unlock the Code to Graduation with 1 Cup of Coffee

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~

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~

To Fellow Readers :

Thanks for giving this a shot. Yours truly appreciates it, truly.

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INTRODUCTION

Hi! My name is Michael Lee. I'll be known as Michael throughout this book. Don't worry. I'll keep this short. My journey started when I was awarded a full scholarship to pursue a career in medicine. Having completed a medicine twinning programme in Malaysia and the UK, I'm proud to say that I had been exposed to the best (or worst) of both worlds – East and West. Is being a doctor the dream of my life? I don't think so. In retrospect, if I were to get a loan to pay for my exorbitantly-priced tuition fees, I would have done another degree, guaranteed.

I don't subscribe to the idea of getting oneself in huge debts just to trade most of one's time and energy away. Sacrificing your time and energy for a job which you are passionate in is one thing, but how much more passion can you possibly spare while losing your hard-earned money at the same? It is not impossible to remain not frustrated, but difficult, very difficult. They say being a doctor is a promising career, but truly, no career is promising unless you are willing to run the extra mile. Therefore, a pragmatic man like me is against borrowing money to study medicine for the love would likely turn to loathe, very quickly.

I was given the opportunity to study medicine for free and derive an indescribable satisfaction from treating patients. For these, I feel eternally grateful, but won't call it a dream. It's wrong, however, to assume that I didn't regard graduation as my dream-come-true. Just like your current self, I had once dreamt of surviving medical school years unscathed, too. The much younger version of me had wondered what made a medical student tick. Over my medical school years, I also wondered whether or not it would take a genius to graduate. The absolute answers to these burning questions are all contained in this book.

It is my sincere hope that the trepidation and insecurity you face in medical schools can be lessened, if not eliminated, after you are done reading this book. You might not be lucky enough to get into the Dean's list, but re-sits or becoming the outliers who struggle in studies should be worries of the past. Fingers crossed! Though conventional wisdoms are present throughout this book, you would notice that certain ideas aren't mainstreams and you might disagree. Everyone has his or her own ways of doing things. If you have been capable of doing well academically, disrupting your Mojo is the last thing that I want and you need. Do keep an open mind and take my words with a pinch of salt if you have devised a better way of handling things. Always bear in mind that this book is written not to think for you, but to make you think. Regardless of your level of medical education, you should find this book beneficial, if not entertaining.

For coffee lovers out there (you know who you are), I have used my favourite Starbucks venti-sized cappuccino as the standard pricing for the book. Considering most of you are fulltime or would-be students, I figure it's sensible to tie the price to a cuppa so that it can be affordable to all. In Chapter 1, I will be gifting you the ways of having the extra edge at surviving in medical school. These are no great secrets, but rather common sense solutions which tend to be overlooked. Chapters 2 & 3 are all about learning, whereas the examination technicalities will be thoroughly discussed in Chapter 4. Words of wisdom are also well sprinkled all over this book in the abbreviated form of WoW.

I think you will enjoy reading this book. The truth is, I am feeling excited already for there is so much that I need to let you know. So, let's get cracking. By the way, thanks for the coffee!

CHAPTER 1 : PREREQUISITE

WOW #1 : CHOOSE THE RIGHT UNIVERSITY

Please. If you are currently not enrolled, read this carefully because what I write here is capable of providing an instant edge towards surviving the 5 years in a medical institution. By the way, you can safely skip to WoW #2 if you are already in an established med school.

Everyone is not born equal. This is not for debate really. In fact, all medical schools are fundamentally different. Different med schools have different histories, beliefs, cultures, teaching styles, assessment methods and learning outcomes. I would like to point out here that not all medical schools are for everyone and this has little to do with intellect. To maximise your odds of success in medical school, find the very university which best fits your personality and learning style. Nowadays, you are basically spoilt for choice with so many universities to choose from, globally.

How to choose wisely? First of all, you need to list down all reputable med schools in the desired region or country. The easiest way is to Google search the most up-to-date University ranking in terms of medicine. Being a UK graduate, I present you the following table. This Guardian's university ranking for medicine contains valuable information such as how satisfied the students were with their respective med schools.

Medicine

More about [this subject](#) and a [key to the headings](#)

Rating	Name of institution	Guardian score /100	Satisfied with course (%)	Satisfied with teaching (%)	Satisfied with feedback (%)	Student:staff ratio	Spend per student (FTE)	Average entry tariff	Value-added score /10	Career after 6 mths
1	Cambridge	100	92	93	65	5.8	10	640	3	98
2	Oxford	87.1	99	98	85	8.6		620	3	90
3	Edinburgh	80.4	96	94	43	6.5	10	585	2	99
4	UCL	74.6	94	92	59	5.4	7	563	7	100
5	Dundee	74.2	92	92	56	4.9	9	549	6	98
6	Plymouth	65.7	95	94	70	7.6	9	508	8	99
7	Newcastle	62.4	96	97	66	8	5	538	7	100
8	Imperial College	57.5	83	89	47	7.5	7	567	4	99
9	Leicester	56.1	92	92	60	6.6	6	520	2	100
10	Keele	54.4	96	98	85	8.2	3	470	9	100
11	Queen Mary	54.1	89	89	55	7.6	6	528	9	100
12	Aberdeen	53.2	94	95	69	8.2	3	535	8	99
13	Nottingham	51	93	93	56	7	4	530	6	100
14	Exeter	50.6	91	92	63	10	5	539	7	97
15	St Andrews	50.2	99	95	75	12.2	3	546	9	89
16	Queen's, Belfast	47.9	94	94	78	10.2	3	518	4	100
17	Manchester	46	71	83	41	8.3	9	538	8	100
18	Leeds	45.9	95	95	60	9.8	6	508	8	97
19	UEA	43.7	89	91	50	6.8	2	515	8	100
20	Hull York Medical School	41.8	91	90	46	9.6	4	537	6	100
21	Birmingham	41	90	93	42	8.6	4	547	3	100
22	Southampton	36.4	91	95	58	8.8	3	502	1	99
23	Brighton Sussex Medical School	34.4	91	94	62	12.7	4	498	9	100
24	Cardiff	34.2	86	85	44	9.8	4	544	5	100
24	Glasgow	34.2	84	86	54	8.9	4	511	3	99
26	Warwick	31.4	84	89	41	10	4		9	98
27	Liverpool	30.3	75	81	43	8.7	6	494	4	99
28	Sheffield	30.2	89	87	55	9	3	501	4	100
29	King's College London	29.5	57	79	18	5.4	6	530	3	99
30	Bristol	26.5	87	94	41	11.4	4	507	4	100
31	St George's, UoL	25.1	69	87	42	10	6	493	7	100

Note: Other providers that deliver courses in this subject area, but for whom there is insufficient data to calculate a ranking position, include Durham, Lancaster and Swansea

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (Hesa); National Student Survey; Intelligent Metrix Ltd

Taken from : <http://www.theguardian.com/education/table/2013/jun/04/university-guide-medicine1>

Should you decide to study in the UK, utilise this list and stay away from dodgy universities. This is the sole purpose of the above list. A decent medical school is as good as any of the top universities in the list as long as you can manage to graduate. What do they call medical graduates from the number 10, 11, 12, and 13 universities in the list? Doctors! For most people, it is the effort put into training after graduation and onwards that distinguishes a modern-day William Osler from a crappy doctor. In fact, if you find yourself struggling in your second year exam because you simply can't remember the names and functions of all the 12 cranial nerves, you are in a bigger trouble than not being able to get into the desired specialty after graduation. Does this make sense?

Here are some basic guidelines to pinpoint the ideal university. If you are an academically-inclined person A.K.A. nerd, narrow down your search to universities which emphasise on knowledge and research. Chances are that you don't need to depend on this book to survive medical school. Oh hey, you are still here! Choosing the wrong university right from the start is bad news. The good news is you haven't wasted your money in buying this book and you certainly don't need to switch university. The bad decision made is past tense. Stay patient and in the coming chapters, we talk about what you can do in order to swim past the stormy years and turn the struggles in a medical school into past tense as well.

If you are an outgoing, sociable person who just cannot sit tight in the library, choosing a university which focuses more on soft skills such as communication skills would stand you in good stead. Usually, these universities have discarded the old-school teaching method and joined the new age bandwagon of self-directed learning. The beauties of self-directed learning are :

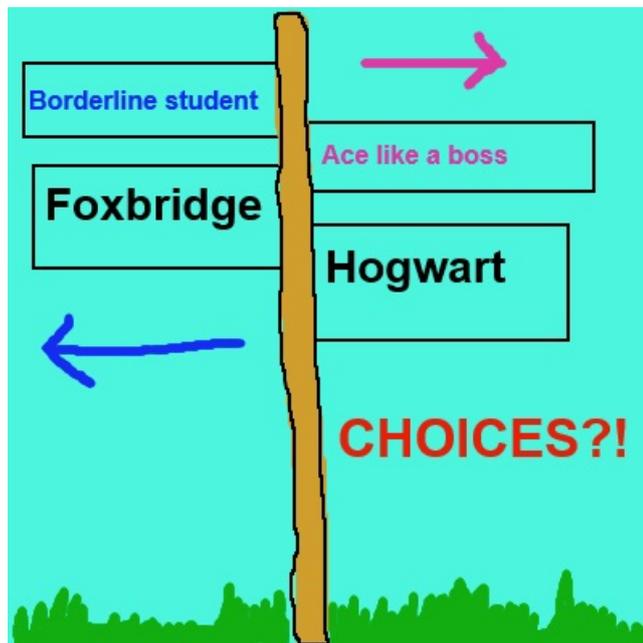
- A. Though initially frustrating, you **learn how to** (*hint* wikipedia *hint*) **seek for information yourself**, eventually. This is similar to the "get a fish vs learn how to fish" concept.
- B. **No one can fail you for not knowing** the rare clinical signs that they have not taught you, can they? However, bear in mind that you might face criticism and be penalised in the wards or clinics for not possessing the necessary core knowledge.

Therefore, do your homework. Ask your pals and people in online forums. Attend universities' open days to enquire more about their unique teaching styles and examination structures, including how many attempts you have before they can officially expel you. For those who are planning to go for universities outside the UK, the same principles apply. I am hoping that, by now, the importance of choosing a compatible and perfect-match university is a no-brainer to you. Growing and competing are much easier in a viable learning environment, thus giving you the extra edge in coming out from the end of that dreaded "tunnel".

There is something else which I feel compelled to point out. Choosing the right university can also LITERALLY mean shortcut to graduation. Don't all of us love shortcuts for they save us time and petrol? Usually, there will be toll charges for taking the highways, but not in this case. This shortcut, if you are taking, can absolutely save you plenty of money. Consider this. University A offers a 6-year course, whereas University B offers a 5-year course. Which would you take?

Setting cost aside, time is your most invaluable asset because time is life. It is finite just like sand which trickles down the hourglass. Sad fact of life, we start dying from the day we were born. An extra year in medical school also means an extra 365 days or 8760 hours of facing the risk of failing. Do you want to spend an extra year floating in the open sea where anything can happen to you? Apart from that, the savings spent on cost of living and tuition fees for that extra year might take years to recover. Therefore, the decisions of many in paying more, sacrificing their youths and exposing themselves to greater risks, all to get the same medical degree never fails to dumbfound me. Why risk more for the same return on investment?

One might be so filthily rich and astoundingly intelligent that doing an extra year is like a walk in the park. But, a smart person should also realise that the time spent walking in a park is unrecoverable, unlike the entrance fee into the park.



WOW #2 : EMBRACE YOUR WHY

Many of us chose medicine for various reasons, be it out of self-interest, family pressure, self-gratification, glory, money or realising a childhood dream. Your reason might be personal, twisted or for a noble cause. Here is a bitter pill that all of us need to swallow. The examiners and universe as a whole do not give a damn about our reasons. They are not here to talent-hunt the next Florence Nightingale, but to identify the strong and weak candidates under exam condition. Fact of life : the strong survive, whilst weak ones get discarded. Period.

So, let's face it. Sitting for an exam, merely equipped with your "why", no matter how grandiose it sounds, is suicide. To medical schools, your "why" does not mean anything more than a conversational topic during the entrance interview. To prove your mettle, you need to show them how strong and capable you are with great performances and results. I am not saying your "why" is useless. What I am saying is cloaking yourself with "why" alone serves no function without hard, solid work in preparing for exams. Similarly, hard core studying to pass exams without a good "why" is not sustainable in the long run because you only have that much gas in your tank for the five-year journey. You will want your "why" to fuel your passion in reaching the destination.

Because medicine can sometimes be a bumpy, painful and lonely journey, you need the fist-sized heart to work with you, not against. Ponder the following statement :

"Dear Heart, please stop getting into everything. Your job is to pump blood and that's it."

Sounds all too familiar? How many of us had actually thought of quitting medicine but repeatedly rehearsed the monologue above because we have simply come too far to fail? Too many! Here's the good news. Out of these, how many had actually failed? Not many, thankfully.

If you had been complaining to your family and friends about how tough medicine was and how bad you wanted to quit yet successfully completed your degree after repeating this monologue over and over again, congratulations Frank Abagnale! Not realising that you had actually deceived everyone including yourself, you did not really desire to quit medicine. Your winning formula? Ironically, it's the good old Heart! The thing which differentiates you from your disgruntled roommate who packed off his bag in Semester 4 is not luck, but your burning desire to pass all examinations. When you sternly instructed Heart to mind her own business, in a way, you're desperately begging for her help in passing your exams.

Awesome! Cheating myself. That sounds like a brilliant idea to me. However, not everyone has the ability to pull off such stunt. To effectively focus your heart on one thing - GRADUATION, you cannot have Plans B, C, D or E just in case you fail medical school. There is no way around it. Plan A should be your only plan. The master plan is to pass all exams at all cost. It's either you commit yourself or you fail. Do or die. Many people, including the former (maybe long forgotten) roommate, do not truly grasp the meaning of burning desire – "burning down all bridges and charge forward".

Med school does not cater only for special people with extraordinary talents. In fact, all you need is abundant mental strength. How much mental strength is sufficient? Well, by pouring the burning desire from your Heart into your "why", you have just brewed a potent potion of determination and hard work which will ensure your continued survival in medical school. And this, my friend, is enough.

If you are missing my point, stop reading, go back to the beginning of the chapter and read it again. Do this twice or thrice if you need to. No one can help you until you have achieved the self-realisation that success in medical school is for ordinary people (people like you and me) who are willing to put in extraordinary effort and be disciplined enough to succeed. Ordinary people with extraordinary determinations. Those are the ones who would make it to convocation.

For those who are still undecided about joining the medical fraternity, bring out your "why" and decide whether or not you are willing to burn all bridges to achieve it. Bear in mind that medicine is more than just a degree course. It is a way of life, a costly one in terms of money, time and energy. Think hard before dipping into medicine. Trust me. You are at an advantage unlike many others who had unfortunately learned about their mistakes too far, too late. Going through this thought process will save you a lot of trouble, time and money in the long run. If you have the burning desire to conquer medicine, "parabens meu amigo!", you have already won half the race. If you, on the other hand, do not possess such strong desire, congratulations as well, you have just spared yourself a lot of unnecessary pain.

Some people say getting registered in medical school is easier than graduating from it. Indeed, medicine is not for the faint-hearted. Starting from the first year, on average, 5-10% of students would lose their way in the mazy tunnel and not manage to come out from it. Another 20-30% would struggle and just scrape through. (Do not take my words for it for these numbers are crunched out based on my past experience. Make your own observation and see whether the real world paints the same picture.)

At this point, you might be rightly concerned that you would end up either being at the bottom of the heap or becoming a scrap heap. It is my sincere hope, bordering on promise, that by the time you are done with this book, you should be with the rest who are going to sail through medical school or even better, in a class of your own. If you are still a below-average student by then, re-read this chapter and this chapter only until your Eureka moment pops up. Based on my observation, sheer iron will and hard works are more than sufficient to pull one through the five years. **To be frank, you do not need to be a genius to survive medical school.**

One friend of mine, Andy, was not that gifted in the memory faculty and was a slow-learner. However, he did not mind asking questions and spending hours in the library to get a definite grasp of each newly-learnt topic every day. He would not leave any of his doubts unanswered to the verge of annoying certain people, including me. There was another batch mate of mine. Let's call her Susan. Susan was such a talented learner that she could absorb whatever the lecturers threw at her and instantly regurgitated questions to challenge the lecturers' teaching. She was one of the top students in the first and second years. However, that was until

she lost focus, skipped lectures and took exams for granted. Her results had gone downhill ever since, while Andy had been catching up.

At the end of the fifth year, Andy's consistently above average results earned him a place in the Dean's list. Where was Susan during graduation day? She was given an opportunity to redo her fifth year. Shit happens, but it happens more often to people who take things for granted. In the end, the annoyingly persistent and solidly consistent Andy won the race. Of course, these are extreme examples of medical students. The point is, I can write pages and pages of how's. However, they are not useful if you fail to discover your "why" and most importantly, summon the strength and determination from your heart to support it throughout your medical school life. As long as you maintain a burning desire to pass medical school, other things are immaterial because you are getting there no matter what.

I will go as far as to say that focusing on your "why" is a **SHORTCUT** to success in medical school. By constantly setting your heart on "why" and training your desire to be stronger each day, your productivity during revision would go up. You would be hungry for techniques to improve productivity and constantly pry into books such as the one you are reading now. The time needed for understanding and memorising things seems lesser. You then become a role model in the eyes of other students. They don't know how you did it but hail you as a genius. But no, both you and I know that there is no such thing. You have simply become a focused learner.



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