

Success in Iran

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*Mental Models to Thrive in the Harshest
Environments*

By Sam Mousavi



There is a world elsewhere

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There is a world elsewhere

To my family; my constant anchor and driving force.

*And to those who understand that
growth is not a destination, but the very path of life itself.*

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Foreword

One thing has always bothered me when reading personal development and success books: why should I have to wade through hundreds of pages of drawn-out, repetitive stories just to grasp a few simple, key concepts?

You have likely experienced this yourself—thick, flashy books that, upon finishing, leave you realizing all their valuable, actionable insights could have been summarized in a few pages. In many of these books, the author inflates a single, simple idea with dozens of irrelevant stories about people living in entirely different circumstances. I have always despised this waste of time. I firmly believe that time—especially for someone hungry for growth and change—is our most precious asset and should not be squandered among filler words.

That is why, when I decided to write this book, I made a vow to take a completely different approach. I wrote this book not to take up space on a bookshelf, but for the “doers.” It is an intensely practical, comprehensive, and no-fluff manual with the highest possible density of key, actionable insights.

What you will read in these pages are not translated, abstract theories that only work in the stable economies and rosy conditions of developed nations. Success in the high-pressure, turbulent, and profoundly uncertain environment of Iran has its own unwritten rules. In this book, I have gathered all the secrets, strategies, and tools that I, along with other successful individuals in Iran, have utilized in these very harsh and complex conditions to achieve remarkable results.

These are not merely copied success formulas; I have tested every single one of them in the trenches, absorbed them into my bones, maximized their utility, and built my own path to success brick by brick using these exact principles.

Success in Iran

If you, like me, are tired of the fluff and are looking for a real, transparent, and battle-tested roadmap for success in a deeply challenging environment like Iran, you are in the right place. Let's skip the preamble and dive straight into the core.

Sam Mousavi

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Introduction

Born into the Hardest Mode: Lessons from the World's Harshest Playground

If we imagine life as a massive, complex video game, most people in the world log in to what we might call “Easy Mode” or “Story Mode.” In developed, stable nations, the game begins with a gentle, step-by-step tutorial. The rules are clear: study well, acquire skills, and work hard, and you will be able to buy a house, own a decent car, and build a peaceful life. In these countries, the economy is like a smooth, freshly paved highway. There might be an occasional bump, but the road ahead is clearly visible, and the formula of $1+1=2$ always holds true.

But to truly understand the “art of success,” you shouldn’t look at those driving on smooth roads. If you want to learn how to stand unshaken in the face of any storm, you must learn your strategies from those whom the system dropped into the absolute hardest level of the game from day one. A level locked on “Expert Mode”—with no guidebooks and no starting gear.

This book is the story and the roadmap out of such conditions. It comes from the heart of the Middle East. A place that can boldly be called one of the world’s most demanding training grounds for human resilience.

Why a Pressure Chamber?

You might ask yourself: *“I am a young professional living in Berlin, London, Toronto, or Sydney. Why should I learn the secrets of success and personal development from a place that faces constant economic and political turbulence?”*

The answer to this question lies hidden in a very simple engineering principle: When engineers want to test the structural integrity of a new component (like an airplane wing), they don’t test it in a gentle,

sunny breeze. They take it into a “wind tunnel”—a place engineered to simulate the most violent hurricanes, extreme pressures, and sudden temperature drops. If the component doesn’t shatter in the wind tunnel, the engineers know with absolute certainty that it will perform with maximum quality and safety in everyday, normal conditions.

The rules and methods of success written in calm, greenhouse environments might disintegrate at the first sign of a personal or financial crisis. But the principles forged in the heart of a real storm – amid severe economic volatility, high inflation, and deep uncertainty – will work with unrivaled power anywhere on this planet.

Let’s take a look inside this “pressure chamber.” A young person trying to build a life in this environment faces daily challenges that are almost incomprehensible to people in more stable economies:

- **A Volatile Economy:** They don’t just hear about inflation on the news; they physically watch the value of money in their pocket shift dramatically within weeks. When annual inflation is extremely high, you have to sprint on a treadmill at full speed just to stay in the same spot...
- **Restricted Access:** In today’s world, the internet is oxygen. But people in this ecosystem face one of the most complex webs of online restrictions and blackouts globally. Just to watch a simple tutorial or send a business email, they have to navigate multiple barriers every single day. They have learned never to freeze at a dead end; they always find creative, persistent ways forward – without ever giving up.

- **Uncertainty and Pressure:** While their peers in stable countries are busy planning weekend getaways, they wake up to breaking news of geopolitical tensions, regional instability, and the looming threat of infrastructure failures...

The Paradox of Pain and Power: The weighted Vest Rule

Reading about these conditions might seem terrifying or bleak at first glance. But the core, hopeful message of this book is born precisely here: **In the heart of the darkest, most crushing pressures, the greatest human strengths are forged.**

Look at the training regimens of elite athletes. Imagine you are forced to wear a 100-kilogram weighted vest every single day and run up a steep, rocky dirt road under the blazing sun. At first, it is agonizing. Your lungs burn, and your legs give out. But if you do this for a year, your body miraculously adapts to the brutal conditions. Your legs turn to steel, and your heart pumps blood like a heavy-duty engine.

Now, what happens if one day they take that 100-kg vest off you and place you on a smooth, standard running track in the cool spring breeze?

You won't just run; **you will fly.** You will blow past everyone who has only ever trained on that comfortable track.

This is the most crucial message I want you—the reader of this book, wherever you are in the world—to remember:

If a human being can navigate a highly volatile and demanding environment – making the right decisions, controlling their emotions, building a business, and moving forward despite endless setbacks... if that same person is placed in the normal, stable environments of Europe, America, or Australia, they will become an unstoppable force.

Perhaps you live in New York, Paris, or Tokyo. Perhaps you feel exhausted and defeated by the recent global inflation, a job loss, or fierce competition in the job market. The mental tools in this book will help you view your life's crises not as insurmountable mountains, but merely as minor speed bumps. In one of the most demanding ecosystems on earth, we learned to extract water from dry stone. Once you adopt this mindset, extracting water from a flowing river (free economies) will become nothing more than a joyful game.

The Elon Musk Trap: Why Comparison Paralyzes Us

One of the greatest fatal errors modern humans make worldwide is constantly staring at the “peak.” It doesn't matter if you are in the Middle East or the heart of Europe; social media has conditioned us to constantly compare our own “starting line” to everyone else's “finish line.”

When you are facing a wall in your life, when your bank account is empty, or your career path is gridlocked, opening Instagram or X (Twitter) and witnessing the absurd successes of others is psychologically damaging. You read the news of Elon Musk landing rockets back on Earth, or you see an 18-year-old who became a millionaire trading crypto.

In that exact moment, instead of getting motivated, your brain experiences a psychological glitch. You look down at your empty hands, then you look up at that distant peak. The gap between where you are standing and where Elon Musk stands seems so impossibly vast that your brain, simply trying to protect you from the pain of failure, issues a shutdown order. The brain says: *“The distance is too great. You'll never make it there. So don't even try. Give up, and just go watch TV.”*

But this is a massive illusion. When you are in the trenches, when the headwind is fierce, you should absolutely not be looking across

the ocean or at distant peaks. Your job is not to build a skyscraper in a single day. That is impossible.

Your ultimate, singular mission in the hardest moments of your life is only to engineer and build the **“next plank of the bridge.”**

Building a Bridge in Thick Fog

To truly grasp this strategy, paint this picture in your mind:

Imagine standing at the edge of a terrifyingly deep chasm. The gorge is filled with thick fog, and you cannot see the other side at all. A violent wind is howling (a metaphor for your economic troubles, bad news, and life’s crushing pressures). To survive, you must reach the other side. What are your tools? Just a few wooden boards and a length of rope.

If you attempt a cinematic, heroic leap to the other side, you will plummet and be destroyed. If you sit on the edge crying, waiting for a rescue helicopter that is never coming, you will freeze to death.

Successful people in harsh environments share one grand secret: Instead of staring into the fog trying to see the other side, they drop their gaze to their feet and ask themselves one magical question:

“With the meager tools I hold in my hands right now (this old laptop, this tiny amount of cash, these two free hours I have at the end of the day), what is the smallest possible step I can take TODAY?”

They tie the first board with the rope and lay down a small plank. They carefully step onto it. Once they confirm it holds their weight, they build the second plank.

You do not need to see the end of the bridge. You are not required to have the entire map figured out at the starting line. You only need to focus entirely on the structural integrity of the single plank you are building *today*, right *now*.

True, enduring success—whether in the heart of the Middle East or in Silicon Valley—does not happen via an overnight miracle.

Success is the byproduct of stacking these tiny, tedious, stubborn, and ruthlessly consistent steps.

The Mission of This Book: A Field Manual for Realists

This book was not written for those who want to daydream on tranquil beaches. You will find zero “pop-psychology fluff” here. We are not going to tell you: “*Smile at yourself in the mirror, hug the universe, and manifest your wealth.*” The cold reality is that the world does not care about our smiles. The world only rewards **execution**.

This book is an “**Operations Manual.**” It is a tactical map that has been battle-tested in the real-world trenches of life and proven to work.

In the upcoming chapters, in a deeply straightforward, logical, and actionable manner, we will learn:

- How to control our inner world and external chaos to extract the absolute maximum ROI (Return on Investment) from events and opportunities.
- How to build a personal “Execution Machine” so that even on days when we are utterly unmotivated and drained, we still get the work done and move forward.
- How to forge skills and networks that are *Antifragile*—unbreakable in the face of sudden economic shocks and the rise of new technologies (like AI).

It does not matter where on this planet you live; if you learn how to build a bridge in the middle of a hurricane, walking in the sunny breeze will be the easiest thing in the world.

It is time to start building the first plank. Step one begins on this very page.

Chapter 1:

Defining Success

When we are children, the world is an infinite canvas upon which we can paint any dream. But as we grow older, society takes a ruthless eraser to this canvas, ultimately leaving us with nothing but a tiny, pre-determined frame it calls: “Success.”

I grew up in a context where traditional expectations were particularly intense. Where I grew up, the path to success was often seen as a narrow, well worn route that everyone was expected to follow. In the society of my youth, success was summarized in a single phrase: passing a highly competitive national entrance exam to secure a spot in medical or engineering schools.

This wasn't just a simple family expectation; it was a major social phenomenon. Families were willing to sacrifice their basic living needs to enroll their children in expensive test-prep courses. In this system, one crucial element was entirely ignored: the genuine capability, passion, and soul of a human being.

I witnessed the clearest example of this tragedy every day in my schoolyard. I had friends who, when they touched a football or played volleyball during recess, displayed the raw talent of professional athletes. In an ideal world, they should have been nurtured in sports academies. In my eyes, their situational awareness and understanding of the game were so high that they had the potential to play for major clubs! But in that environment, they were only allowed to “live” for the duration of that fifteen minute recess. Once the school bell rang, the dreams were extinguished, and they had to march straight back to the library to cram for medical exams.

Common beliefs at the time strongly discouraged pursuing these talents. If someone wanted to be a writer, they were told: “*Writing doesn't pay like medicine; you'll starve to death!*” If someone dreamt of football, the response was: “*Sports are run by*

mafias and nepotism; your chances are zero.” And if someone loved practical skills like carpentry or tailoring, they were met with a condescending glare: *“These jobs lack class and prestige!”*

Today, years later, the fate of those brilliant schoolyard talents serves as the bitterest proof of how limiting such narrow definitions can be. One of those gifted friends, under intense family pressure, went down the medical path. Today, he is still completing his medical rotations, but due to severe depression, life dissatisfaction, and a profound lack of well-being, he is constantly under the care of a therapist. He wears the white coat of “success,” but he has been hollowed out from the inside. The other friend, who dreamt of football, neither made it to the sports world nor cleared the hurdle of the medical exams. He now works in a retail store, and the last time we spoke, he looked at me with lost eyes and said: *“I don’t even know what I’m doing here.”*

This pressure was so powerful that I, too, with all my different dreams, was dragged into the vortex of this terrifying competition. My days and nights became intertwined with the stress and anxiety of the exam. But when results day arrived, I did not achieve the required rank to reach that imaginary utopia. By society’s unwritten law, I was a “loser” and had to register for the exam again the following year, wasting another year of my life.

But precisely in those dark days of despair, something happened that altered the trajectory of my life forever. I met an entrepreneur. He wasn’t a famous celebrity; he was simply someone who was happy with his life, had pursued his passions, and had built diverse teams. Talking to him was like turning on a flashlight in that dark tunnel. By asking a few different questions, he showed me that I was running in a race I didn’t even belong in, illuminating a rough path for my life—a path leading to a completely different destination than the one society had mapped out for me. That was when I recognized the greatest obstacle to success: **the blind acceptance of other people’s definition of it.**

I made a terrifying, courageous decision. Defying the heavy stares and judgments of those around me, I stepped out of that grueling rat race. I decided to forge my own path; a path paved with ideation, problem-solving, and addressing the real needs of the market. That very decision, years later, led not to a forced degree, but to the creation of several successful startups.

The experience of those years and witnessing the fate of my friends taught me a profound lesson: **Success is not a uniform that society forces you to wear; it is a bespoke suit, tailored precisely to your own measurements.**

But the core question remains: In a world that constantly tries to shove us into pre-determined molds, how can we hear our true inner voice? How can we break free from the paralyzing expectations of family, media, and society, and redefine “success” on our own terms?

In this chapter, we are going to dive straight into this exact issue and explore the strategies that will shift you from playing on someone else’s field to engineering your own personal path...

Now, you tell me. Have you ever sat in solitude to answer this seemingly simple, yet incredibly complex question: *What is the true definition of success?*

Please, before you continue reading this book, close it right now. Close your eyes for a few seconds and think about this word. Based on your knowledge and your understanding of the world, when you hear the word “success,” what image projects onto the screen of your mind? Who is a successful person in your eyes? What traits do they possess that made the court of your mind stamp “Successful” on their forehead, while denying that badge to thousands of others?

Let me guess. If you are like over 90% of the world’s population, the images that just flashed through your mind are likely a combination of these: a bank account with endless zeros, stepping out of a high-end German luxury car, holding the deeds to multiple villas and luxury apartments, wearing designer clothes, and living in flawless

comfort with zero financial worries. In the international arena, figures like Elon Musk or Warren Buffett probably come to mind.

If these images surfaced, do not blame yourself. You, like billions of others, are the victim of a historical, mass psychological conditioning. We live in an era where the giant machinery of media and social networks weighs success on a one-dimensional scale: **“Money and the display of assets.”**

People like Elon Musk, Bill Gates, or Cristiano Ronaldo are undoubtedly successful in their respective paths, perhaps even the most successful. But there is a crucial caveat here. What do we actually see of their lives? What do we know about the exact path they traversed? Are the trajectories of these “successful” individuals copy-pasteable? Are there generic formulas to reach their exact level? Or must we accept that our lives, our families, and our financial and cultural starting lines are entirely unique to us, meaning we must run our own exclusive race and level up step by step?

The Illusion of Wealth as Success (The Reductionism Disease)

In today’s modern world, a dangerous disease called “reductionism” has spread. We reduce all the complex, beautiful, and profound dimensions of a human soul and its achievements into a single number: a bank account balance. This superficial view leads to a massive cognitive error.

Imagine we place two people in front of you. Both live in luxurious penthouses and drive multi-million-dollar cars.

- **Person A** is a young individual who started from the absolute bottom of society, endured years of sleepless nights, failed repeatedly, fought tooth and nail for their ideas, and reached this point through sheer personal grit and intelligence.
- **Person B** is someone whose only “talent” in life was being born into a wealthy family. They inherited this entire empire or

acquired it through familial nepotism, playing zero role in creating that wealth.

On the scale of today's society, are these two people equal? Yes! Unfortunately, a superficial society bows to both of them and labels both as "successful." The reality is that the second person should never, under any circumstances, carry the heavy, sacred weight of the word "successful." They are not successful; they are merely a "lucky human being." Biological luck and geographical determinism simply spawned them inside a vault full of cash.

If we fail to understand the difference between **"creation-based success"** and **"luck-based wealth,"** we will spend our entire lives running on the wrong track.

Who is the Judge in This Court? (The Trap of External Labels)

If we accept that the conventional definition of success (i.e., solely having money and wealth) is fundamentally flawed, we must face a deeper, more philosophical question: Essentially, who determines what it means to be "successful"?

After all, the adjective "successful" is a label. It has to come from somewhere and be pinned onto someone's chest. Let's analyze how human attributes work.

When we say someone is "tall," that is a physical reality. If someone is 190 cm tall, it is a fact that they are tall.

When someone gives away their wealth to help those in need unconditionally, we say they are "generous."

But what makes a person "successful"? And more importantly, who places this crown of success on their head? The people on the street? Friends and acquaintances? Instagram followers? Family?

Let's make a critical correction right now: If you believe success is an external factor and that society must grant it to you, you have

fallen into a horrific psychological trap. If we give others the power to label us as successful or unsuccessful, we are essentially handing them the remote control to our happiness on a silver platter. We develop the illusion that we can dictate judgments over other people's lives, feeling a false sense of power knowing our opinions affect their happiness or depression.

Unfortunately, social media has pushed this crisis to its absolute peak. We sprint across the storefront of Instagram just to harvest likes and validation, begging others to tell us in the comments: *"Wow, you are so successful!"*

But the reality is that human attributes are inherently relative; they cannot remain fixed forever. You might be the tallest person in a group of friends where the average height is 175 cm, standing at 182 cm. But buy a plane ticket to Scandinavia or the Netherlands, and suddenly you realize you are shorter than most of the society!

Or take the example of kindness. You might have, under specific circumstances in the past, made a significant financial contribution to a neighbor or relative. From that day on, in the eyes of your entire extended family, you are known as the symbol of "kindness and sacrifice." Everyone considers you a great philanthropist. But when you go to bed at night and are alone with your thoughts, your conscience whispers that those actions were merely driven by fleeting emotions in that specific moment, and deep down, you have absolutely zero desire to lift another finger for anyone else.

In your solitude, you know you are not inherently selfless; you are merely hiding beneath the shadow of others' positive judgments. And this is exactly where the realization must hit: **All the titles and attributes that are supposed to give us our identity must first spring from our own internal well, not from the validation of others.**

The Hollow Winner Paradox (The Story of a Hidden Collapse)

To better understand this difference between internal and external success, let me share the true story of a man who was the ultimate symbol of a “hollow success.”

A few years ago, I met a man who was going through a very difficult period. His business had failed, he was drowning in debt, and he felt like a complete failure. To escape the psychological pressure, he used the last of his savings to go on a cheap getaway, hoping to just shut his brain off for a few days. In the town where he was staying, a massive local lottery was taking place. Purely for entertainment, and with the mindset of “*I’m always a loser anyway, what’s one more time?*”, he bought a ticket and sat in a hall with over 380 participants.

When the wheel spun, to his absolute shock and disbelief, his number was called: He won a staggering, dream-like sum!

The crowd, unhappy that a non-local had won, protested. The organizers, to quell the uproar, found an excuse to void the draw and run it again. The wheel spun a second time, and then, something akin to a miracle or a glitch in the universe occurred: The exact same code was called again! This time, no one could protest. Luck, with all its heavy weight, had landed squarely on his shoulders.

He returned to his city carrying a suitcase of wealth. No one knew the lottery story. But he was rich now, and his lifestyle had to change. A new car, expensive clothes, a chic office.

He knew that if he told people he won the money in a lottery, the ruthless society would say: “*See? You didn’t have what it takes. You just got lucky!*”

To escape this judgment, he began weaving a massive web of lies. He fabricated a Hollywood script, telling everyone: “*On my trip, I networked with an investment group in small towns, partnered in construction projects, took a massive risk, and multiplied my capital tenfold.*”

This heroic narrative was exactly what society wanted to hear. Very quickly, he became a “model of success” in his circles. People applauded him, the younger generation asked him for mentorship, and everyone viewed him as a brilliant, bold, and “successful” man. On the surface, he stood at the top of the world.

But what was the reality behind the curtain? He couldn’t sleep at night. He was suffering from the most severe form of **“Imposter Syndrome.”** In his dark solitude, he knew he possessed no economic knowledge, no crisis management experience, and no financial intelligence. He knew the mansion of his wealth was built on a bubble of sheer luck. A paralyzing fear consumed his entire being, because he knew that if tomorrow morning, even half of this wealth vanished due to inflation or a bad investment, he had zero skills or strategies to recreate it.

It can be stated with certainty that most people who win massive lotteries while lacking the internal readiness, knowledge, and management skills to handle those numbers, ultimately lose it all—and sometimes end up worse off than before.

The man in our story met the exact same fate. After 6 years of a seemingly prosperous and comfortable life, he gradually lost vast amounts of money, made terrible investments, racked up massive debts, and ultimately passed away heavily indebted.

He was, *temporarily*, a lucky rich man, but he was never a “successful person.” **Success is not what sits in your bank account; success is the person you become in the process of achieving that goal.**

The Law of the Root and the Rain

We all agree that in the journey of success, luck, good fortune, genetics, and positive events beyond our control play a massive role. It is a motivational lie to claim that luck doesn’t matter, society doesn’t matter, or environment doesn’t matter.

Therefore: External factors are influential, but they are not the sole determinants!

Let's use the metaphor of a growing tree. Good events and luck are like "rain." Rainfall is vital for a tree's growth, and no tree survives without it. But what must this rain fall upon?

The tree must first have a seed that cracked open through hardship. It must have driven its roots deep into the dark soil. It must have sprouted, resisted harsh winds, and built a core trunk and structure so that the rainfall (luck) can fuel its further growth.

If you pour millions of gallons of rain onto street asphalt, not a single tree will grow! Luck, for someone who hasn't built internal roots (skills, knowledge, discipline, and mindset), is like rain on asphalt: it only causes slips and crashes. Someone who lacks internal capacity will destroy billions of sudden wealth in just a few short years.

Luck can cover a ten-year journey in a single night. A suitable environment can smooth the path. An ideal family can bring peace to the journey. But *all of these*, without sufficient internal preparation, will yield no lasting results.

Adapting Success: Navigating Local Realities

Now let's examine all these concepts within a complex and demanding local environment.

Success does not have a one size fits all formula. This becomes especially clear when you face economic volatility, rapid social changes, and daily uncertainties.

From your teenage years, you realize a bitter but true fact: If a young person your exact age, with a similar IQ, lives in a more stable economy, they have a completely different path for self-discovery. They exist in a stable environment with high psychological security. They can calmly experiment with their passions, fail, pivot, and

never have to worry about a sudden, overnight explosion in currency or housing prices.

But in this context, the rules of the game are different. Here, you have to work with fewer safety nets. For this reason, you must **“personalize”** and **“localize”** the definition of success for yourself.

Do not let flashy Instagram videos of dream lives in Dubai or Los Angeles make you feel inferior. Success in a challenging environment sometimes demands a far braver and deeper definition.

If you grew up in a family riddled with tension and psychological trauma, yet today, through awareness, therapy, and immense effort, you have managed to break that toxic behavioral chain so you don't pass it on to your child; **you are a profoundly successful human being.**

If, in the heart of a highly volatile economy, you have managed to build a respectable career, go to sleep at night without the nightmare of crushing debt, maintain your financial and intellectual independence, and feel in your heart that you are more aware, calmer, and performing better than the generations before you, and you are simply *content* with your life; **you are, in the truest sense of the word, a successful human being and the hero of your own life.**

Success is not an external storefront built to satisfy the eyes of strangers; success is that deep sense of satisfaction you feel when you look in the mirror and respect the human being you have built.