



THE PROMISE OF A PENCIL

Discussion Questions

CHAPTER 1:

Adam introduces his story by describing his childhood, explaining how his family helped define him as an individual. What role does your childhood upbringing play in the development of who you are?

CHAPTER 2:

Adam applied to the Semester at Sea program in order to get out of his comfort zone. Why do you think this is important, and how can you practice getting out of your comfort zone, in small or big ways, in your life?

CHAPTER 3:

Why does Adam include the story of his time on the Semester at Sea ship?

CHAPTER 4:

Adam discusses his habit of asking a child in each country, “if you could have anything in the world, what would it be?” If he had asked you this question, what would you answer? Why do you think the boy from India responded with “a pencil,” and why was this such a transformative experience for Adam? Have you had any experiences like this in your life that could serve as the basis to your story?

CHAPTER 5:

Why did the Cambodian Children’s Fund business cards mean so much to Adam? How can you practice the mantra of doing something small to make others feel big in your daily life?

CHAPTER 6:

What were some of the highs and lows of Adam’s time backpacking through South America? In his conversations with locals, why do you think that education was such an often repeated answer as something that was necessary in their community? How did Adam live by the mantra of “tourists see, travelers seek?”

CHAPTER 7:

Adam began struggling at his management consultant job when his passion for Pencils of Promise was unstoppable, but he still had responsibilities to his work. Have you ever been in this dilemma? When is it important to follow your passion or adhere to responsibilities, or how can this time be evenly divided?

CHAPTER 8:

How did Adam come up with the name Pencils of Promise? Have you ever experienced a “lightning moment” such as his?

CHAPTER 9:

What small, unreasonable acts did Adam and the initial supporters of the organization take in order to fulfill a big dream? Why does Adam stress belief in the impossible when starting the organization?

CHAPTER 10:

Why was it important for Adam to get in trouble at work? What did this teach him? What is the relationship between failure and success in this story and more generally?

CHAPTER 11:

Describe the experience of breaking ground on the first school in Laos. Why does Pencils of Promise require that the local community provide 10% of the cost of the school build?

CHAPTER 12:

In this chapter, Adam speaks about the importance of walking with a purpose in relation to a very nerve-wracking experience. In what other circumstances is it important to walk with a purpose? How has Adam exemplified this?

CHAPTER 13:

How can you celebrate or honor a loved one, or someone special in your life, like Adam did when he dedicated the first school to his grandmother?

CHAPTER 14:

How would you define an impossible one?

CHAPTER 15:

Why is it important to be resilient in the face of disappointment? Why did Adam continue on his road trip when only one person who listened to his first presentation?

CHAPTER 16:

Adam mentions a quote by Reid Hoffman, the founder of LinkedIn, who said that an entrepreneur is someone who will “jump off a cliff and assemble an airplane on the way down.” How did this relate to Adam’s current situation? What signs along the path led him to jump?

CHAPTER 17:

Why is it important to create separation in order to build connection? How does Adam practice this, and how can you practice this in your life?

CHAPTER 18:

Adam is persistent in receiving pro-bono services to build the website. How did this persistence pay off, and why is it important to never take no for an answer from someone who can't say yes?

CHAPTER 19:

Why did Adam turn down the competing job offer and decide to continue pursuing Pencils of Promise? Have you every faced a decision that pinned your values against your perceived necessities?

CHAPTER 20:

Who were the key people that Adam speaks about in this chapter as helping to build the organization? What roles did they play within Pencils of Promise?

CHAPTER 21:

What role did public speaking and press stories play in the first impression of Pencils of Promise? Why did Adam think it was important to wait until the organization had grown before promoting it?

CHAPTER 22:

What mistake did Adam make when speaking to his team in Guatemala? How did he learn from this mistake and rectify the situation? Why is it important to always own up to your faults?

CHAPTER 23:

What does closing the loop mean? How can you use the lessons that Adam learned about following up with others in your daily life?

CHAPTER 24:

What inspired the term “for-purpose,” and how does Adam define it? Can you think of other organizations that use this model? Why do you think so many organizations are blending profit and purpose in today's society?

CHAPTER 25:

When Adam speaks to Justice in Ghana, Justice says to him “Hope is not enough. You have to believe it, and then it will be so.” Why does he say this, and how did Adam turn these words into actions?

CHAPTER 26:

Adam speaks about the importance of surrounding yourself with the people who will help you grow. Who are positive people in your life, and how can you further foster those relationships?

CHAPTER 27:

Why was Adam insecure about personally asking for donations for Pencils of Promise? How did he ultimately turn this weakness into a strength for the organization? How can you make steps toward turning a weakness into a strength?

CHAPTER 28:

In this chapter, Adam describes the stories of others who have played a part in the Pencils of Promise movement. Why is it important that others now carry on his story, and it is no longer a singular mission?

CHAPTER 29:

The mantra of this chapter is an adopted quote from Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia and the first female president of an African nation. What does this mean to Adam, and what does this mean to you?

CHAPTER 30:

What can you do to create extraordinary change and make your life a story worth telling?

GENERAL QUESTIONS:

Choose the five mantras that speak the most to you. Why?