It’s all a matter of choice, really

BE CONFIDENT: Accepting loss as a random occurrence provides a great lesson to succeed later

I WAS visiting Amsterdam for the second time and was still amazed by the presence of polders, which are low-lying tracts of land enclosed by embankments known as dikes. It is, therefore, no surprise when people say: God created the world, but the Dutch created Holland.

As the Dutch have a long history of reclamation of land, about half of all polders in northwest Europe are within the Netherlands and the first polders went as far back as the 11th century.

To me, this is a fine example of human resilience and tenacity. Where there is no land, reclaim. Where there are floods, build dikes.

It is amazing how we respond differently to problems: personal or global. Psychologists say we are loss-averse as human creatures.

Losing holds a stigma, be it losing face or actual loss. Studies have indicated that we attach greater value to losses than we do to successes of equal measure.

Apparently, the pain we suffer in losing RM1,000 is greater than the joy we get in receiving RM1,000.

We can go on lamenting for days when we lose something but the joy of finding something is short-lived in comparison.

Repeated failures may result in prevailing pessimism.

We have all known people who are always grumbling or lamenting about their ill fortune even though they are better off when compared with others.

These are the ones that we find it a pain to talk to because they are always talking about their troubles. These are the ones who attribute mistakes to conditions that they cannot change.

Each mistake is interpreted as a testimony to inadequacy. The result is the tendency to rely on self-defeating coping behaviour such as making excuses, quitting, avoiding challenges, denying or blaming others.

Instead of punishing ourselves with “I must have done something wrong to deserve this”, viewing loss as a random occurrence provides a beneficial lesson that will help us succeed in the future. Some say that it is but a “teaser” from life when we are on the brink of succeeding.

Let’s take the school scene, for instance.

It has always been said that Asians do well in Mathematics, but not so with the Irish.

More than 4,000 students failed Mathematics in the Leaving Certificate last year, with close to 10 per cent of students failing the ordinary-level Mathematics paper.

At present, only 16 per cent of students take Higher Level Mathematics, and curriculum planners have a target of 30 per cent. All seven universities in Ireland now give bonus points for Higher Level Mathematics in the Leaving Certificate.

Apparently, the large number of Mathematics teachers taking Leaving Certificate classes are not fully qualified.

In Malaysia, if you throw a stone, you are likely to hit a tuition centre. Such is not the norm here.

Malaysian parents are also seen scuttling from one tuition centre to another looking for the best teachers, best teaching strategies or best tutorial notes.

Another difference is the bookstore.

In Malaysia, they are well stocked with materials for examination classes: reference books, guide books, model an-
answers, how to score distinctions and the like.

Over here, the scenario is very different. The next best thing, besides the textbooks in a bookshop, is past-year papers. So, it is not uncommon that most students just give up in the Mathematics classroom.

On a more global scale, in the face of disaster lies opportunities for renewal or ultimate defeat.

When Japan was hit by an 8.9-magnitude earthquake last year, there were no signs of looting although millions of people did not have water or power, and security forces had their hands full with rescue operations. A reporter on CNN said it was because of the Japanese culture.

With the recession hitting Europe, Canada is an attractive destination for Irish job-seekers.

According to Canada’s Immigration Department, the number of temporary Irish immigrants has shot up over the past decade, from 1,118 in 2000 to 2,959 in 2009. The number of registered permanent immigrants went from 180 to 503 over the same period.

Having said that, it takes great resolve for one to rise from the ashes. Yet, like the mythical phoenix, to do so is to emerge confident and strong.

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