



August E-Newsletter

Choosing Nontraditional Paths: Nurtures Resilience and Purpose in Students



Dear AASuccess family, friends, colleagues, and supporters,

This month's news contains, in addition to lots of useful information, two remarkable essays by our students. They take us on an emotional ride through the landscape of our consciousness, in ways that help us readers to explore the limits of how we think about ourselves, who we are, and where - and how we may fit into the larger world.

Labor of Love



In the first, longtime AASuccess student Leo Lue shares with us his journey, which I have had the honor to witness and participate (on the periphery) that has taken him from a somewhat shy young kid who took his time to slowly get to know the AASuccess community, to a confident and extremely capable young man, poised on the cusp of adulthood, who knows what he wants to do in his life, and has a plan to get himself there. **He describes how his curiosity and determination has led him to the path he has chosen...and it is not the "traditional" path (as he describes) that most of his classmates in his prestigious academic high school (TJ) are likely to choose.** He doesn't say so directly, but his determination to take a nontraditional professional (and academic) path, directly reflects the values that he learned here at AASuccess. That, combined with a supportive family, will take Leo Lue to wherever HE determines he wishes to go, and that journey will surely be a successful one.

AASuccess newcomer Emi Liu takes us on a different and more emotionally raw journey. Sharing with us her painful realization that regardless of what horrible obstacles and barriers life may put in her path, including indirectly from her own extended family, only our own determination and will allows us the path forward. As she put it, "...**working with AASuccess this summer has helped me to understand something deeper {than survival}: there is a difference between enduring because you have to and building inner resolve because you choose to**". And THAT is the theme not only of her essay, but of her life. As she shares with us the painful story of her early life, complete with betrayal and complete abandonment of people who should be cherished grandparents, to the resulting actual physical suffering and dislocation that she and her family endured, what begins to emerge to us is not only a resilient young women who has turned her suffering into a compassion for others. In her quest to become a Healer - a doctor, she has used her self awareness and life experience to care for others...using compassion that was forged in fire - the fire that nearly consumed she and her family in their journey, but instead made Emi stronger, more understanding and more able to use her experiences to help make the lives of others better. As I got to know Emi Liu over the summer, even before knowing the details of her life story, I could sense something different in her from others her age. She seemed to have a self understanding and a calm that came through as we had light conversations in the office on a variety of topics...some lighthearted, some heavy. Her ability to discern the difference between surviving and thriving essentially sums up her life experience thus far, and the self-actualization and self recognition that she has employed to help get her to where she is, is frankly nothing short of inspirational.

Jim Kelman
Board Member and Mentor

Celebrating Growth Through Challenge: Reflections from Our 2025 Gala

The success of AASuccess's 2025 Annual Gala is a testament to the dedication and collaborative leadership of our Operations Team, led by **Angela Le, Liem Nguyen, and Lara Tran**. Their journey reflected the Gala's theme, "Ebb and Flow," as they balanced heavy responsibilities with authentic student ownership.

They faced challenges—last-minute guest cancellations, the annual \$50,000 fundraising goal, and the complexity of uniting high school and college students without the structure of a traditional workplace. Yet, through passion, countless hours of planning, and problem-solving, they delivered a near-flawless event.

Their commitment exemplifies the AASuccess learning model: when young people are entrusted with real responsibility, they not only exceed expectations but also grow into confident leaders ready to create lasting community impact.

OPERATIONS TEAM



Lara Tran

Operations Team Member
Life Skills Academy Head



Angela Le

Operations Team Member
Student Project & Scholarship Head



Liem Nguyen

Operations Team Member
Marketing & Fundraising Head

Operations Team Leadership in Action

This month, we hosted our Annual AASuccess Gala. Our theme this year was "Ebb and Flow", celebrating the trials and tribulations that we have overcome not just as an organization, but as individuals. Our students, volunteers, mentors, and staff constantly seek challenge and the growth that arises from it. This year, we have had many standout examples of this growth.

Let's start with Operations. Despite being our second year as a unit within AASuccess, we have found immense success in recruitment for both Students and Volunteers. This is especially true for this month, as we have accepted four new students to the organization, each of whom will be paired with a mentor who will bring out their strengths while developing their leadership and communication skills. Our volunteer mentors are the backbone of the organization, so if you or anyone else you know would like to mentor one of our students, reach out and apply!



A group of students presenting their "Shark Tank" idea in front of "sharks", who are adults volunteers and Operations Team.

Another important example of growth through trial would be our system for community projects. If you missed the Gala, one of our key initiatives that we wanted to share was our "Shark Tank Success". In this program, community projects are pitched to us by students before we give the resources, funding, and the green-light for our students to execute them. Not only does this help them with their presentation skills, but it also allows our students to be personally involved and invested in the process of project development. Before this program, many of our students would be assigned projects and would also lack public speaking experience. With "Shark Tank Success", we are able to get them involved through a fun but challenging medium.

These are but a few examples of what we do at AASuccess. As we head into the new fiscal year, keep an eye out for new and exciting projects and initiatives. We thank everyone that came to this year's Gala and celebrated our growth with us, and we hope that you return for the 2026 Gala!

Liem Nguyen
Senior - Psychology Major at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)
Operations Manager & Gala Coordinator



Why I Chose Plant Science



Leo (in the blue shirt, center) co-organized the 2021 Plant Sale with Aashee Balani, an initiative designed to promote house planting and raise awareness about plant care.

Yesterday, I watched a video of my senior class answering the question, ***“Where do you see yourself in 10 years?”***

Classmates dreamed of becoming business owners, doctors, and successful professionals. It made me reflect on why my path is a bit different, choosing agriculture and plant science over a traditional STEM major, with hopes to study at a school like Purdue or Virginia Tech.

Friends often joke: “Why become a farmer?” “Isn’t that a waste of money?” Maybe. However, I believe that as long as you have passion, any path can lead to success. I also believe in this: live a life worth living. For me, happiness is being outdoors, working with plants, and solving problems in sustainable ways. I fondly remember studying agriculture in the U.S. Virgin Islands, backpacking with Outward Bound, and leading environmental initiatives like Go-Green; even at school, I keep that curiosity alive by learning about sustainable agriculture and having fun with school greenhouse projects.

Finally, having no regrets. Agriculture and plant science are vital fields. They feed the world, help the environment, and can change people’s lives. I want to do all three, and I know I won’t regret going down this meaningful path.

Leo Lue

AAS Level 2 Student

Senior, Thomas Jefferson High School



Go Green team at the 2025 Earth Day Festival in Chantilly, VA



Building Inner Resolve: Why I Don't Let Outside Voices Define My Path

In this powerful reflection, Emily Lieu shares how her relentless spirit was forged through hardship, family struggles, and the fight for her sister’s life. She takes us from mere survival to choosing resilience, showing how compassion and purpose guide her journey toward medicine. Her story reveals not just strength, but the transformation that happens when determination meets opportunity.

People often ask me how I stay so driven despite everything my family has been through. The truth is, I don't think I have a choice. When you've seen your little sister fight for every breath, when you've watched your parents lose everything for love, when you've lived in severe poverty and still made honor roll, relentless isn't something you become. It's something you already are.

I used to think that was just survival. But working with AASuccess this summer has helped me understand something deeper: there's a difference between enduring because you have to and building inner resolve because you choose to.

Learning to Fail Forward

My journey began in California, though I can barely remember my childhood home because I’ve moved too many times to count. My older brother, lost due to a miscarriage, is with us only in spirit from a time of intense family issues and stress; sometimes I wish I weren’t the eldest and had guidance, maybe someone like my older brother to lean on. My parents both lacked wealth, and because of that, their marriage was never accepted by either side of the family. The stress and heartbreak from being disowned by my grandparents left my parents homeless and abandoned. My mother often had to navigate public transportation alone, in pain and pregnant, while my father worked tirelessly day and night to keep us afloat. And now, during my late nights studying, I still find myself trying to comprehend how my family could turn their backs on my parents so cruelly like that. My grandparents doubted that I would ever amount to anything, especially compared to my male cousin. We were only ten. But I refuse to be confined by the expectations placed on me.



The Voices That Guide Me Now

I’ve faced financial hardship, emotional instability, and hunger, yet I have become what my father calls the “light at the end of the tunnel.” Living off free lunch and major government support groups like EBT which provides money for food, and Medicaid, which covers healthcare costs for severely low-income families. I graduated high school with honors, earned medical training certifications like Narcan Administration and Stop The Bleed, and officially obtained my Certified Clinical Medical Assistant (CCMA) license. I took on leadership roles in multiple organizations, and now, I’m marching forward with the support of scholarships, Pell Grants, and federal work-study, as I begin my journey at Virginia Commonwealth University Honors College. Majoring in Biology with minors in Psychology and Chemistry on the Pre-Med track, I’m working toward a future where I can provide compassionate care to underserved communities.

I used to think my relentless spirit was about proving everyone wrong. Now I understand it's about proving myself right: right to believe that my inner change doesn't take a century, just courage, right to take up space in healthcare, right to center underserved individuals in my work.

The Difference Between Surviving and Thriving

This understanding of resilience shaped how I approach medicine itself. I’ll never forget the sound or lack of it, when my little sister gasped for air as she cried. No cries came out, just tears and holes in her lungs. She was born prematurely, with complications so severe that every moment felt like a ticking bomb. The hospital became our second home. Those long nights were terrifying, filled with fear whether she’d survive. But at the same time, they felt like moments of rest, under a warm blanket in a safe shelter, something we didn’t always have. During those times, I witnessed firsthand what it means to be a truly impactful doctor. Our pediatrician and her team didn’t just treat my sister, but she supported our whole family. Despite overwhelming odds, our doctor remained to show her hope and determination to save a life, my sister’s life. She was incredibly knowledgeable yet took the time to explain things in clear and non-technical language because of the background we came from. She would get us warm blankets even if my dad refused because he didn’t want to be seen as needy. I remember her holding my hand as I cried, unsure if my sister would make it. That compassion, paired with expertise, had transformed me. That shift changed everything. I started viewing patients not just as clinical cases but as people with layered beliefs and lived experiences.

Building Together with AASuccess

I now want to be relentless in learning and ensuring that others, especially those who are overlooked or underserved, have the same opportunity to thrive. Everyone deserves to have access to the care that sustained my family for so long. My education is my world right now, but I know I must start somewhere. Volunteering at MCV Hospital and joining AASuccess helped shape a vision: to start a health initiative called “Teddies,” where members are a "teddy bear" and bring comfort during people’s darkest moments. AASuccess doesn't try to fix me or change my relentless nature. Instead, they've given me something invaluable: the trust to explore who I am when I'm not constantly defending my right to exist in spaces I'm told don't belong to me. I'm still relentless. But now it's not because I have to be, but it's because I choose to be. And that makes all the difference.

Emily Lieu

**Biology major with minors in Psychology and Chemistry on the Pre-Med track at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)
US-IBDC Intern & AAS Volunteer**

Rotary Club of Bailey's Crossroads: Building Bridges with AASuccess



Members of the Rotary Club of Bailey's Crossroads supported Aashee Balani in her Winter Giving Back project, contributing \$2,000 worth of necessities and household supplies distributed through the Second Story system to shelters in need.

The **Rotary Club of Bailey's Crossroads** (<https://www.bxrrotary.org>) has long embodied the spirit of "Service Above Self." Its support of AASuccess highlights how powerful it is when seasoned community leaders and youth come together at the intersection of volunteerism and life-skills learning.

Through the kindness of members such as **Alif Brahim**, **Pauline Rosenstein**, and **James Holcombe**, this partnership has created more than programs or donations—it has fostered real relationships. Adults bring wisdom, experience, and encouragement; teenagers bring energy, curiosity, and fresh perspectives. Together, they inspire one another, proving that volunteerism is not one-sided but a mutual journey of growth.



This collaboration reflects Rotary's belief that service is most impactful when it nurtures future generations while reminding us that every generation has something to teach. By joining hands across age and experience, the Rotary Club of Bailey's Crossroads and AASuccess are building a stronger, kinder community—one meaningful connection at a time.

Bridging Methodologies for Maximum Impact: An Interview with Len Tran

*This month, we're honored to feature **Len Tran, USPTO Supervisory Patent Examiner and founder of Kinetic Mind LLC**, who brings a unique outside perspective to our AASuccess methodology. As both a volunteer coach within our community and a successful business owner, Len demonstrates how professional development and character building create powerful synergies. His RISE methodology - Revitalize, Initialize, Strategize, Energize - complements our 3H-3S-3A framework while serving diverse clients from young professionals to seasoned executives.*



Question 1: How does your RISE methodology (Revitalize, Initialize, Strategize, Energize) intersect with the AASuccess "Head, Heart, and Hands" holistic development model, particularly in complex projects like the BioHealth Conference? What indicators reveal a student's true integration of cognitive strategy, emotional revitalization, and effective execution?

Answer: Passion is paramount for any project or development plan. In students promoting the July 19, 2025 BioHealth Conference in Hanoi, Vietnam, I observed their passion and desire for personal growth. This passion, stemming from their "Head" (cognitive intent) and "Heart" (emotional drive), fueled their commitment to execute the plan.

My RISE method naturally aligns with this:

- **Revitalize:** Understanding and generating the necessary energy.
- **Initialize:** Taking the crucial first action to start.
- **Strategize:** Planning thoughtfully before acting blindly.
- **Energize:** Maintaining excitement and drive to achieve fruition.

The AASuccess "Head, Heart, and Hands" model perfectly complements RISE. While the "Head" handles thinking and the "Heart" provides feeling, "Hands" are crucial for execution. This seamless alignment between our methodologies was key to the successful BioHealth event.



Question 2: As a USPTO supervisor with over 15 years of experience managing complex processes, what process efficiencies do you identify when observing AASuccess students applying the "3A framework" (Attitude, Authenticity, Action) in projects like the BioHealth Conference or the August 9, 2025 gala planning? Given your own methods, how would you re-engineer your coaching approach to accelerate leadership development, particularly focusing on character and authenticity?

Answer: Drawing on 18 years of leadership at the USPTO, managing hundreds of employees, I observe distinct qualities in AASuccess students. Unlike some professionals who view work as routine, these students excel due to their exceptional Attitude, Authenticity, and Action.

- **Attitude:** Despite limited professional experience, their drive to succeed and make events publicly impactful is remarkable. This contrasts with a routine "8 to 5" mindset.
- **Authenticity:** Their genuine mutual support fosters critical teamwork, which accelerates project completion.
- **Action:** They consistently take action, often meeting in small groups daily, to ensure tasks are completed.

I see little to "re-engineer" in their approach, as they are already performing exceptionally well at a young age. My advice would be to "not modify a well-run engine" and to encourage their continued proactive approach until they encounter an obstacle requiring adaptation or re-engineering.

Question 3: Your martial arts background emphasizes "Control, Courage, and Confidence" (3Cs), aligning with the AASuccess community's ethos. How do you leverage Kinetic Mind and your martial arts expertise to share this methodology with professionals, helping them adopt the strengths demonstrated by AASuccess students and enhance their existing credentials?

Answer: Kinetic Mind LLC focuses on helping individuals and organizations prioritize "what matters most" in a distracted world, ensuring execution over numerous undeveloped ideas.



As a "middleman" for the AASuccess community, and through our proven results working together, I would engage potential partners by asking what truly resonates with them about AASuccess's community betterment efforts. Once priorities are established, execution follows using the 3Cs (Control, Courage, and Confidence):

- **Courage:** To execute despite self-doubt or external opinions.
- **Control:** To manage mindset and accept obstacles, then find solutions.
- **Confidence:** The conviction that the goal will be achieved.

This framework enables individuals and organizations to work in unison for community betterment and can also be applied to enhance leadership development and career mobility for professionals within a company.

Question 4: Given your personal journey from overcoming adversity to becoming a USPTO leader, Kinetic Mind founder, and author, how do you leverage this unique background, particularly your emphasis on "courage" and resilience, to help clients apply your RISE methodology and expand their leadership horizons? What distinct value does your experience bring to potential clients?



Answer: While Kinetic Mind works with both individuals and companies, my primary focus is individual growth, as company success ultimately originates from employee development. My unique value stems from my personal journey, starting with nothing as an immigrant from Vietnam. This background informed my philosophy of living by "**3Ms**": Meaningful, Memorable, and Mesmerizing.

I challenge clients to ask: ***"Do I want a meaningful, memorable, and mesmerizing life?"***. Embracing these 3Ms provides the courage needed to *"stay the course"* and overcome obstacles. Courage doesn't mean never backing down; it means re-evaluating, re-strategizing, and then re-engaging with renewed resolve to achieve ambitious goals, like becoming a CEO. My experience demonstrates that this approach transforms confusion into confidence.

Question 5: Given the current AI-driven world and the need for diverse skill sets beyond single specializations, how can individuals seeking to reduce distractions, maintain focus, and find courage engage with you and your Kinetic Mind methodology? Please provide specific resources for initial engagement and describe how your unique background empowers them to "initialize" their journey.

Answer: In today's AI-driven world, where specialized degrees might lead to fears of job displacement, I advocate for viewing AI as a "friend" to leverage skills and quickly retrieve information for execution. My approach helps individuals overcome these fears by providing a formula to control their mind and focus.

To engage with me and Kinetic Mind, the following resources are available:

- **Website:** lenvtran.com (V is for my middle initial).
- **YouTube Channels:** "Master Your Mind": Focuses on mind control and prioritizing "what matters most". Martial Arts Channel: Emphasizes the crucial link between a strong mind and body.
- **Contact:** Email, LinkedIn, and Facebook links are available on my website.
- **Books:** 1. Memoir, *Split Up By The Sea*: Chronicles my journey from humble beginnings to success, demonstrating that anyone can achieve their goals with the right formula. 2. Self-help book, *Break the Bricks*: Provides a formula to identify and overcome personal "bricks" (obstacles) and apply the RISE method to achieve anything.



My methodology is universally applicable, not just for recent graduates, but for anyone from a young child to seasoned professionals seeking leadership development or career advancement. For AASuccess community members, I offer specialized coaching rates and group session opportunities. It helps address inevitable self-doubt and impostor syndrome at any life stage, which is why professionals often seek these leadership development partnerships - they recognize that individual growth drives organizational success.

Initial engagement often begins with group coaching to provide a general understanding, followed by deep-dive individual coaching for personalized development.



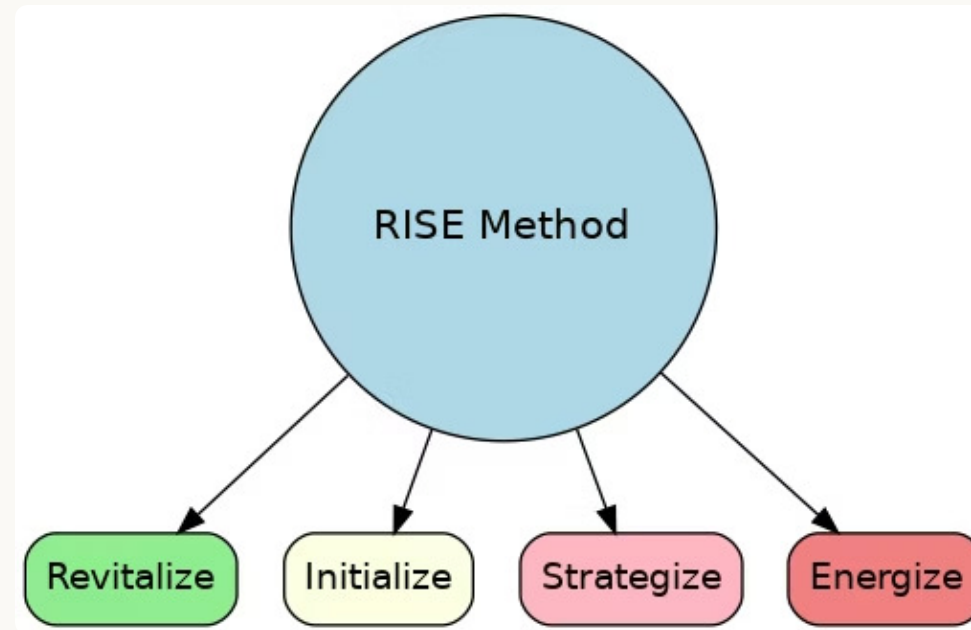
Question 6: From a systems engineering perspective, what are the critical bottlenecks you observe in AASuccess's current model that could limit our ability to scale impact? How might your business experience inform strategies for ensuring more predictable leadership outcomes while maintaining the authentic mentorship relationships that define our success?

Answer: From my engineering and management perspective at USPTO, I see AASuccess's strength in its personalized approach, but scaling requires systematic frameworks without losing the authentic mentorship core. The main bottlenecks I observe are:

- **Resource Allocation:** Currently, mentor bandwidth limits student capacity. A tiered mentorship model could help - senior mentors focusing on complex cases while developing junior mentors for foundational work.
- **Standardization vs. Personalization:** The challenge is creating consistent outcomes while honoring individual growth paths. My RISE methodology can serve as a standardized assessment tool that mentors can adapt to each student's unique situation.
- **Measurement Systems:** Engineering teaches us that what gets measured gets improved. AASuccess could benefit from milestone tracking that quantifies both hard skills (project management, communication) and soft skills (emotional intelligence, resilience).

The key is implementing systematic improvements that enhance rather than replace the authentic relationships. Just as USPTO maintains rigorous standards while allowing examiner discretion, AASuccess can scale systematically while preserving its mentorship heart.

Framework Integration Guide



[RISE ↔ 3H-3S-3A Quick Reference:](#)

- **Revitalize** connects to **Heart** (emotional energy) and **See** (awareness)
- **Initialize** aligns with **Hands** (taking action) and **Action** (3A framework)
- **Strategize** matches **Head** (cognitive planning) and **Attitude** (strategic mindset)
- **Energize** sustains **Seek-Seize** (opportunity pursuit) and **Authenticity** (genuine commitment)

[3Cs ↔ AASuccess Core Values:](#)

- **Control** = Emotional Intelligence and Self-Management
- **Courage** = Integrity and Innovation in facing challenges
- **Confidence** = Empathy and Crucial Conversations with others

Want to Learn More About RISE Methodology?



Len Tran's Kinetic Mind LLC offers specialized coaching for professionals seeking to enhance leadership capabilities and overcome career obstacles. AASuccess community members can learn more about framework integration opportunities at lenvtran.com

Resources:

- **Books:** "Split Up By The Sea" (memoir) and "Break The Bricks" (self-help)
- **YouTube:** "Master Your Mind " channel for focus and productivity strategies
- **Contact:** Visit lenvtran.com for coaching programs and community partnerships

Community Connection: As an AAS “Core” active member, Len demonstrates how individual excellence and community impact create sustainable business success.

This interview demonstrates how professional expertise and character development create powerful synergies. Through performance-based partnerships like this one, AASuccess continues to build bridges between personal growth and professional excellence, one meaningful relationship at a time.



Keep the Engine Running with Just \$10/Month!!!

At AASuccess, we believe that every young person deserves the chance to learn, grow, and thrive through life skills training—not to be burdened with fundraising to keep our programs alive. That’s why we are reaching out to you, our community, to join us in sustaining this mission.

A monthly gift of just **\$10** can go a long way in helping us maintain our office operations, provide a stable environment for our students, and keep the “engine” of our programs running smoothly. When you contribute, you’re not just helping with overhead—you’re directly empowering students to stay focused on what matters most: developing leadership, emotional intelligence, and career-life readiness.

We are also excited to share some great news: **AASuccess is now officially listed in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC)!** Federal employees and retirees can now select AASuccess as a beneficiary using our **CFC ID: 88404**.

Your support—whether through the CFC or direct monthly giving—ensures that our students can continue to transform their futures without distraction. Together, we can keep this powerful cycle of mentorship and learning alive.



Join us today with a \$10/month pledge and help fuel the future of our youth!!

Donate online: [AASuccess.org/donate](https://aasuccess.org/donate)

AASuccess: Perfecting the Act of Giving Back

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www.aasuccess.org

A community without boundaries, built on the principle that when we invest in character development alongside competence, everyone thrives.