The Pursuit of Happyness Viewing Guide for Teachers

1. At the beginning of the movie, what roadblocks does Chris have to overcome in improving his life?

He has no college degree
He has a young child to take care of
He made a poor investment in bone density scanners, which has rendered him broke and prevented him from pursuing more profitable opportunities
He is behind on payments, having spent more than he earned

2. What sacrifices did Chris have to make to get a better job?

No pay; no regular place to sleep; little time to sleep due to having to work and study; son in lower-quality daycare; had to lend a few dollars here and there for colleagues that didn’t see such expenditures as a big deal and pay for a parking ticket for his supervisor; had to hide the humiliating fact that he was homeless and didn’t have a car; had to work on weekends to sell his scanners.

3. What did Chris do to stand out among the other interns?

Chris devised strategies to be more efficient such as not hanging up the phone between calls and not taking breaks to get water or go to the bathroom. He also skipped up the callsheet to call the more powerful people, which had the potential to bring his firm the most money, when he knew he was ready.

4. Describe how Chris used networking to his advantage in getting an internship at Dean Witter and signing new clients.

Chris understood the value of introducing himself and persistently following up with Jay Twistle, who would be a decision-maker in hiring. He also saw the benefit in following up with Walter Robbins’s friends even though Robbins explicitly said he himself was not interested in what Chris was selling.

5. Chris reminisces about getting As on his exams and dreaming about all the wonderful things he could become, yet he observes that he didn’t become any of those things. Why do you think this happened?

Though getting good grades often opens a lot of doors for students when they graduate, Chris didn’t capitalize on his grades by going to college. He likely didn’t have a plan for how he was going to make a living or have a realistic impression of how much it would cost to live on his own and support a family.

6. Name three of the Six Es of Excellence and describe how Chris demonstrates them.
Expectations: He set a very high standard for himself, applying for a prestigious internship despite his suspicion that his qualifications were severely lacking compared to most applicants and despite the fact that only the top-performing intern would receive a job offer. He expected to succeed, and he did.

Enthusiasm: He had boundless enthusiasm for excelling at work, which at its core was motivated by his desire to create a better life for him and his son.

Energy: Chris put an enormous amount of energy into becoming successful. He went above and beyond to meet the person in charge of hiring. He spent his weekends pursuing sales calls to sell his scanners and stayed up late each night to study for his internship or fix the broken scanner. He streamlined his workflow so he could get more done in less time and leave in time to pick up his son and, in some cases, get in line at a shelter.

Enterprise: Chris demonstrated an amazing knack for recognizing and capitalizing on opportunities. Though it was risky to accept an unpaid internship when he couldn’t even afford housing, he judged the potential payoff to be worth it. He also recognized the value in catching a cab with Twistle and networking with Robbins’s friends at the football game.

Efficiency: Chris was incredibly efficient and let no time go to waste. At work, he devised systems to get more work done in less time, and though he still took time to be a good father to his son, he spent a good deal of time outside of his internship studying or working to sell his scanners.

7. How did Chris demonstrate the four problem solving techniques?

Delaying gratification: Chris recognized that working hard at an unpaid internship, even though it meant living on the streets, had the potential to pay off later in a big way.

Accepting responsibility: Chris accepted responsibility for the mistakes he made that landed him and his family in poverty, but most importantly he accepted responsibility for getting out of poverty.

Dedication to truth or reality: Chris knew that if he wanted a better life for him and his son, he would have to work hard to make it happen. No one else could do it for him and it wouldn’t happen with only minimal effort, either.

Balancing: Though Chris spent a lot of time working and studying, he still made time to hang out with his son.