THE RECIPE FOR SUCCESS—THE REAL ONE

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This summer, I faced one of the most exciting, but at the same time, intimidating experiences of my life, the Scripps National Spelling Bee. When I entered the auditorium for the first time, I felt like my eyes would litter burst out of their sockets. Bright splashes of color, from a vivid orange to a deep indigo, played with my eyes. As I walked down the infamous red carpet which former winners and presidents alike had trodden upon, a new desire swelled in my heart. Far from the entrance, I could see the contestants, as tiny as ants, while right above them loomed the golden symbol of the bee. And in plain sight, so close that I could touch it, rested the trophy. It stood proud and tall with an ornate finish, beckoning me towards it. When it was my turn to spell, I climbed up the wooden steps, each footstep echoing with a loud thud. I felt my heart pounding in my ears, my throat constricting, my knees buckling. And I looked out at the audience, stunned at what I saw. Far from me, my parents gave me an encouraging nod and a thumbs up. Like flower petals blowing in the wind, my friends waved their hands in the air, mouthing at me. Spell.

“Ganibaldi.”

I heard the voice of the judge, crisp and clear, above all the commotion. And suddenly the room went deathly quiet. Cameras went snap, and lights blinked up at me. I could see news reporters milling around, their pens scribbling quickly across the paper, the scratching noise echoing like a million crickets.

Finally I managed to spur out, “G—A—R—I—B—A—L—D—I—!”

“Correct.”

My heart rate sped out of control, a huge smile breaking out on my face as a loud cheer erupted from the audience, my competitors giving me high fives and mouthing “great job” at me. I sat in my chair with a dizzy feeling of relief, but I realized, with a jolt, that I would probably not advance to the next round, for I hadn’t prepared as much as I should have.

A few minutes later, the judge announced the names of the semifinalists. I sat on the edge of my seat, clenching my fists and hoping to hear my name. But I never did. Once all of the names were called, I sank into my seat, disappointed. I had known all along that I wouldn’t advance, but a small part of me thought I still had a chance. When I walked back to my parents, they reassured me that I had done a great job and that as long as I tried my best, the result didn’t matter. Instead of feeling reassured, I felt a sinking feeling in my stomach; I didn’t try my best. Though I studied for a few minutes each day, after a couple of weeks of studying, I grew frustrated with the immense number of words that I had yet to learn and gave up. I didn’t put in my best effort, and after that point, I gave up on learning new words entirely.

After I returned home, I found myself pondering my mistake and wishing I could redo the competition. Many a day, I mentally slapped myself for not preparing enough, and after the incident, I resolved to never give up. The realization that I could have made it to the semifinals if I persevered a bit more greatly irked me. However, this experience taught me a priceless lesson which I utilized well in my next big competition, a famous Indian singing show called Paandita Theeyaga.

As I have watched this show for many years, I felt delighted to learn that it would tour America and began to imagine myself as a guest singer on the upcoming show. Consumed with a desire to get in, I stayed up late many nights, praying that I would be selected. And finally, I was accepted to compete in the seven-week-long contest and travel across the country each week.

Filled with a burst of inspiration, I practiced the required songs so much that the lyrics were imprinted in my mind, with the rhythm infusing my nerves and the melodies taking over my heart. Then the big day arrived; I felt so nervous that my throat constricted, but I managed to sing fairly well. Like many other competitors, my hard work seemed to pay off—but that was only the first day. As I advanced throughout the show, it became more and more difficult to cope with the stress, and many a day, cooped up in a hotel room, I practiced non-stop. Admittedly, at times, I fought back tears and nagging frustrations, feelings voiced by other contestants as well. Moreover, as the competition grew more intense and more contestants dropped out, I found myself in an unknown position as I had, until this time, never participated in such a long and intense competition.

This long and intense competition, one that truly challenged me, made me wish, for the first time, that I could give up. In comparison to the other contestants, I had little formal vocal experience, a position that took its toll on me. Yet, the memory of the spelling bee still fresh in my mind, I kept on trying and worked hard to make the last cut, with a Winston Churchill-like will to “Never, never, never give up.” Although I did not win, I made it to the finals, finished fourth place, and worked through my first major singing competition.

Looking back, I am shocked at the number of troubling moments I faced, yet in the end, I feel happy that my determination paid off.

Through all of my experiences, I have come to understand that you cannot escape trouble—it will hunt you down and find you, whether you ask for it or not. The strongest person is one who tries to overcome obstacles as best as he can, with patience and perseverance, for that really is the only way to overcome them. If you give up, if you don’t try hard, you won’t achieve your goals. Perseverance is key, and without it, you cannot achieve anything in life.