

Never Give Up: Perseverance, Persistence and Determination at Work

By Lyndsay Swinton

“Never, Never, Never Give Up” said Winston Churchill, UK prime minister, after heavy Blitz bombing in World War II. We know in our bones that perseverance, persistence and determination are solid character strengths. But when the pressure is on, why do some dig deep and others buckle under the strain?

Call it what you will - laser-like focus, sheer bloody mindedness or hard-work- they are all key ingredients for success. But what if the thing we are so determined to succeed at turns out wrong for us? The genius idea is a commercial failure. The test results are only good not glowing. Or you don't make the elite sports team. What do you do?

Dragon's Den is a worldwide TV phenomenon where budding entrepreneurs seek financial investment from wealthy business investors, for a share of their company. The 'dragons' play with their victims unless there is a scent of money to be made, then they get serious. Viewers can quickly learn what it takes to be a successful entrepreneur.

There are many factors at play. Presentations skills, ability to stay calm under scrutiny, financial acumen, track record, potential, energy, oh and a great product. But one over-riding success factor is staying power – to never give up, even when the odds are stacked against you.

My recent favourite was Sharon Wright, a single mum from a depressed north English town. She was attractively presented, and horror, blonde, so obviously she was going to ask for investment in a nail salon or similar. Not so. She had worked doggedly for the past 2 years designing, testing and selling a product to simplify fitting domestic cabling through cavity walls. She made UK Dragon's Den history by having all 5 potential investors discuss who was best placed to work with her, and offering more money than she'd asked for.

What blazed through about Sharon was the hard work and attention to detail that took her from idea to profitable reality. Her leap of faith to leave a good job in health and safety to work 16 to 20 hours a day turned out right for her.

“Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time” Thomas A Edison

What kept Sharon motivated? My take on Sharon's success is her ability to remain objective about problems and solve them systematically.

Problem solving is best done with a fresh head – your granny was right when she advised to “sleep on it” before following through on a big decision. And even if there is huge emotional attachment to the problem, you can increase your spare mental capacity to deal with it by taking 10 minutes to relax deeply before going any further.

So your test results aren't so good. Maybe you didn't study enough – so next time, change your study plan. Maybe the topic isn't your passion – so change to a course that's more interesting.

And if you didn't make the elite sports team, maybe you try something different but related. Magnus Sheving a world class athlete in the obscure sport of aerobic gymnastics, created the kids TV show “Lazy Town”, with the superhero ‘Sportacus’ to motivate kids to be healthy in life. The show now airs in over 100 countries and the production company speak to at least 500 children a week.

“There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so”, Hamlet, Shakespeare.

Nothing is so good or so bad that you can't make some sense from it. You might have to work a little harder or change your focus a little, but never give up*.

**Okay, I'll revise that “never give up” sentiment a little. At the other end of the Dragon's Den spectrum are the deluded incompetents who've sunk money and time on a dead horse or project fantasy business growth. Yes, they never gave up, but along the way they lost their objectivity (and possibly the roof over their heads). Determination and perseverance are important but sometimes it's okay to give up and start afresh.*