

Lesson 1 Believe That You Can Do Better

The Magic of Believing That You Can Grow

Think of an ordinary boy who likes playing sports like you and your friends. One day, as he returns from school, his mom and dad are waiting outside and pointing at the garage. His mom smiles and says, "We have a surprise for you." When his dad pulls the garage door open, there is a table-tennis table inside! The boy is excited. He recently joined the school's table-tennis club and wanted to practice more. He rushes to the other side of the net and challenges his dad to a match.

Let's pause the story here. The boy now faces a big choice. He could choose to challenge himself to grow and face difficulties with endurance and courage. Or he could avoid new and challenging experiences and choose an easy, familiar path.

The Boy Who Chooses an Easy and Familiar Path

Let's start with the path of avoidance. The boy waits for his dad and concentrates hard. When the ball comes flying across the net rapidly, he misses it completely. He puts his hands on his knees and sighs. "Never mind," says his dad, "Try again. Practice makes perfect."

When the boy serves the ball, it returns with full force, hitting and bruising his elbow. The boy is not having much fun. He sets the paddle on the table, saying, "I have had enough," and leaves for his room.

His dad asks for another game the next week, but the boy still has some pain in his elbow and just does not feel like taking up the challenge. When his mom suggests playing against his older brother, he turns down her suggestion because his brother is very tough.

"No, thanks," sighs the boy. "He's going to be better than me anyway."

In his eyes, challenges are nothing more than obstacles, and he holds onto the belief that they are best avoided.

The Boy Who Embraces the Challenge

Let's rewind to the point when the boy first faces his dad across the net. His first attempt does not go any better, and he still gets hit on the elbow on his second try. However, he picks up the ball and tries again anyway.

An hour later, his dad still keeps winning easily, but the boy is learning from the experience. Every now and then, he even surprises himself with a decent return, and a few times, he almost hits the ball past his dad. The boy later on decides to challenge his older brother. His brother is a better player, but the boy likes the idea that he can work even harder.

The boy learns from his mistakes and develops new skills by practicing. He practices hard after school, on weekends, and on holidays until he is able to join the regional team. Eventually, he participates in the national championship and makes it all the way to the finals. He finds his opponent to be skillful and smart, but he plays hard. He finds himself at match point, and the audience holds its breath. He realizes how far he has come. For years he has gotten up early to practice and has loved the challenge of improving his game. He serves for the match and sneaks the ball past his opponent. He punches the air in triumph. He has become truly awesome!

You may have the idea that this is simply a fictional tale. However, this is the true story of Matthew Syed, a former member of the British national table-tennis team. His tale shows how an ordinary boy developed his passion for table tennis and eventually became the national champion. Because he had a growth mindset, he tried something new, discovered what he truly desired, and then became tough when he faced a difficult task. How about you? Do you see yourself in the story? You, too, can find your own "table tennis." It might be a hobby, a career, or a personal goal. What is important is that you embrace the challenge and never give up on what you want to achieve. Go out there and achieve your goal!