

DeWERS IMPERFECT



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We all have heroes. We admire them on the big screen, hang on to their every word as they give powerful speeches, watch them give themselves to others and our country. From movie stars to activists, and even to our own parents, our heroes usually influence us to be better and be present for more than ourselves.

As you read this, I am sure you are thinking of your hero. I have a hero, too: my late uncle, Dr. Narendra Sampat. Growing up, I had a very close relationship with my uncle. We spent many memorable afternoons on the porch swing in the veranda, where he'd tell me stories and share life lessons.

While my uncle was not a celebrity, he was an incredible dentist. It should be no surprise, then, that I grew up wanting to be a dentist, too. I wanted to be like my selfless uncle, offering free oral care to underserved populations and answering the door in the middle of the night without complaint when patients had emergencies. I visualized myself being as altruistic and compassionate as he and carried that vision with me all the way to adulthood.

During my first two years at Rutgers University, I discovered a passion for marketing. I couldn't admit this to anyone out loud, however. It felt like a challenge to my life's purpose. I'd been so confident for so long, so steadfast in my determination to go to dental school and honor my uncle, that it felt unfaithful to entertain the idea of changing direction.

Yet, as my folder for dental school applications grew thicker, I only grew more anxious, worried that my thoughts betrayed my true calling. I'd never felt so unsure of anything before, so I did something I'd never done: I made an appointment with a career counselor.

When I explained my conundrum and confusion about wanting to waver from my lifelong goal, the counselor

listened empathetically. Then she said, "If you think you want to do something, you're already born with the power to do so."

Thanks to that advice, I was able to reframe what it meant to honor my uncle. To this day, he is with me in the way he inspired me to help others — something I can do without becoming a dentist, leveraging my unique interests and talents. And, in my own way, I've still found myself working in the dental field.

I share this story because in order to receive what ended up being one of the most critical pieces of advice in my career and life, I had to first experience doubt and uncertainty. Then, I had to turn to a stranger for help.

If you are successful today, it's at least partially thanks to the imperfect, doubt-riddled experiences others had and chose to share with you. We're all reading books, listening to podcasts, attending webinars and conferences and (ah!) talking to people in order to become or stay successful. It takes failure, struggle and experimentation to achieve success; and we all have authors, leaders, speakers and mentors to thank for sharing their most vulnerable moments with us so we can grow.

None of us are in this alone. From childhood heroes to objective advisors, we set goals and reach them with the help of others. Once we grow comfortable with the idea that we don't have all the answers, and comfortable working with people in the same boat, we start to truly succeed.

People often compliment me on "having it all together," but, the truth is, that isn't always the case. I often turn to advisors, mentors and people I look up to for reminders of what I am capable of. More importantly, to hold on to that perfect image of myself would hold me back. Like you, I am not perfect. We are all, in fact, wonderfully imperfect.