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How does an average student from an average middle class Midwestern family become the CEO of a public SaaS company? For PagerDuty CEO Jennifer Tejada, it didn't involve some grand plan or overwhelming talent. Instead, she says, her career and the careers of those she respects have been powered by grit. Drawing on Angela Duckworth's book "Grit," Tejada urges aspiring entrepreneurs to practice daily resilience.



Transcript

So, I appreciate you all making the time.. I wanted to start and just talk a little bit about how you get from 1989, you know, Econ 101 in Ann Arbor, Michigan as a freshman to CEO of Public SaaS company in Silicon Valley.. Because it's probably not as straight forward as you think.. I mean, when I finished high school and got to college, I thought, "Well, I'll make sure I pick the right major, "and I'll take all the right classes, "I'll get the right grades, "then I'll get the right first job, "and then I'll get the right second job, "then I will obviously be a CEO one day," like, that's how it will work.. My journey, or adventure, as I like to think of it, couldn't have been further from that.. So, I am sort of the epitome of middle-class, Midwestern average.. I'm 5'4", that's the average height of the North American woman.. I got average grades.. I took classes in the liberal, science and arts part of Michigan, which is pretty average, it's what you do if you don't know what your major is gonna be.. I was a reasonably good student but not great, as proven by my average grades..

And I came from an average family, which, at the time, there were four kids in my family, that was pretty normal back then.. So, nothing exceptional at all about me and when I think about how someone like me gets from there, 1989, sitting in a room like this, with, by the way, no laptops, no iPads, number two pencils and notebooks, to where I am today, it starts with grit.. And so, how many of you read, or at least looked at this book by Angela Duckworth? I sent, yeah? Oh good, smartest people in the class.. This is a great book, I don't know Angela, I'd like to meet her someday, but what I love about this book is it's a book about the science of perseverance.. And if you want to be an entrepreneur, if you want to disrupt a category, or disrupt a company or business, if you want to create something that doesn't exist in today's world, or change something that you don't think that works about today's world, then you better be prepared to be tested, over and over again.. And I don't mean hard, freshman, weed out classes.. I mean people testing your conviction time and time again, testing your vision, testing your philosophy, testing your approach, your tactics, the people you choose, the category you choose, what you choose.. And what I like about Angela's book is it's pretty straight forward discussion on the difference between being hardworking and being smart and being resilient.. And when I think about our employees at PagerDuty, we have about 700 employees, when I think about the employees that really stand out, when I think about the leaders that I know in and beyond Silicon Valley, in tech and in other categories or companies that I'm affiliated with, I'm on the board of Estee Lauder, for instance, I think about Fabrizio Freda or William Lauder, like, what's different about them? It's that, no matter how many times people told them no, people told them that was a terrible idea, people told them they were a failure, people told them they didn't do well enough, et cetera, they bounce back bigger, better, stronger.. That's grit..

And I give you another example, people who are not gritty, people who are not resilient, will have a bad day, any of you have a bad day today? Yeah, it was okay, we all have bad days.. They have a bad day and if you're kind of a normal, average person, you'd say, "I've had a terrible day.. "Geez, I really hope tomorrow is a better day.. "Please Lord, give me a better day tomorrow." A gritty person will say, "Damn it, I am gonna make tomorrow a better day.. "I resolve that tomorrow will be a better day." Gritty people own their own destiny.. They plan, but if the plan doesn't work out, you recover, you learn, you figure out what didn't go well, what am I responsible for that didn't go well, what do I need to do differently? How am I gonna execute a different plan tomorrow? Right, but you don't give up.. I think that's a really important part of it.. So, I hope you'll find an opportunity to read this book because there's just, there's a lot to like about it and it's very instructive.. And, I don't think that you have to be born with grit.. I think you can learn to be resilient...

