

A person with red braids is seen from the back, looking out at the ocean. The sun is setting behind a dark, cloudy sky, creating a bright glow. The water is a deep blue. The person is standing on a boat, with a railing visible in the foreground.

Soraya Toppin-Herbert

Through My Eyes

A series of reflections and lessons

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my "Village" who has always stood alongside me and pushed me towards Excellence!

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Introduction

If you are like me, you have been in situations where you have felt like you were the only person struggling with a situation or an issue. One of my best examples is from my freshman year in college playing NCAA Division 1 football (soccer). I felt like I was the only person struggling with our fitness sessions. As a result, during my freshman year, I struggled through most of these practices. Then, I had a heart to heart conversation with one of my coaches about my struggles and realized that I was not the only person who found the fitness sessions difficult. I wished I had realized that I was not alone in the struggle a lot earlier.

Introduction

Sometimes, it just helps to know that someone else is struggling or has struggled with your problem. Once I accepted that I was not the only one who hated fitness workouts and that others were able to be successful while sharing the same feeling, I realized there must be something I could change to be successful as well. The change I made was my perspective, instead of dreading the entire fitness regimen; I took the sessions one rep at a time. Fast forward a couple of years to my senior year when my leadership skills had evolved and I was now helping teammates make it through fitness practices.

Maybe you are wondering what this has to do with the book. The above reflection is the background for why I share my knowledge and experiences with others and why I am sharing this book of some of my reflections and lessons learned with you. I hope that after reading this short book, you will feel inspired to conquer every situation and know that you are not alone with your struggles.



Faith

Patience

Uncomfortable

Dreams

Worth



Chapter 1

FAITH



FEAR

Chapter 1: Faith



To me, **faith** is the belief that everything will come to **fruition**. It is the root of everything I do, and one of the reasons I tend to see the good in people and situations. This may also be the reason why I am a dreamer. I believe that anything I want to achieve will be attained, God willing, and this fuels my faith.

Faith

When I think back to the period leading up to and including moving to the USA to finish high school, the only thing that explains that period is faith. In pursuit of a football (soccer) scholarship, I moved to the USA at the age of 15. The decision to move to the USA was one of the most difficult ones I have made in my life. At 15 years old, I decided to leave my family, move to a different country, and live with strangers to achieve one of my dreams of playing football overseas. One does not make a move like that, if you do not have faith. I believed that I was going to be successful in gaining a scholarship and that my fears of returning home empty-handed would not be realized. I believed, and by extension, my parents believed! We believed that the family I was going to live with were good people and that I would be safe thousands of miles away. We had faith that the experience I was about to go on was going to improve my life, and we set aside our fears to hold on to our faith.

Faith



Through my faith, I earned a full football scholarship to attend and play at Purdue University. I cannot imagine what my life would have been like if I had stayed in Barbados. My sacrifice and faith paid countless dividends. Faith can be the difference

between realizing your dreams and wondering what if.

Don't limit yourself because of what you do not know.

Step out in faith.

Lesson Learned:

Our greatest journeys begin at the border of faith and fear.

If we have the courage to step out in faith, we open ourselves to a life full of unexpected beauty and happiness. The greater the risk, the greater the reward applies to faith as well. The greater your faith, the greater your blessing.



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because of what you
do not know. Step
out in faith.

- Soraya Toppin-Herbert

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Chapter 2: Patience



How patient are you? How well can you handle setbacks and delays? Admittedly, I was not the most patient person in my younger years. I made plans, and I expected things to go as planned without delay. I quickly learned, mostly through football, that I had much growing to do regarding patience. The more I learned about patience, the more I learned to let go and rely on my faith that things would improve.

Patience

As I mentioned, my greatest teacher of patience was and still is football. Throughout my football career, I have had numerous injuries, luckily none too serious. During my freshman and sophomore years of college, I struggled with a groin injury that impacted my training ability, and by extension, my match time. As a result, I played very few minutes in my freshman and sophomore years. This led to me questioning my place on the team, my ability as a player, and whether or not I would stay at Purdue.



Patience

Through my groin injury, I learned to be patient with myself and with my situation. I also learned to control the things I could control. The most frustrating part of dealing with this injury was that no one could determine the cause of my injury. After over a year and a half of dealing with this injury, I finally received a diagnosis I had athletic pubalgia, aka sports hernia. Following successful surgery, I was able to play half of my sophomore season.

Fast forward to the end of my junior year, and I was dealing with another injury. This time tendonitis in my right ankle made striking a ball very painful. Just when I thought I had learned my lesson about patience, here I was being tested again. If that was not enough of a lesson, after finally being healthy, no ankle pain, and no groin pain, I added a quad strain to the list at the beginning of my senior season. My injuries did not end in college; I have sustained several quad and hamstring strains since leaving school. (I know I need to work on my muscle strength and flexibility).

Patience



Although each injury brought a mixture of emotions, I learned to persevere and discovered a lot about the capacity of my body and mind. My college journey was filled with injuries, which led to frustration and self-doubt; I was extremely close to giving up. The joy I feel

every time I reflect on my trials and the fact that I graduated often leaves me speechless. I am convinced that had I not learned to be patient with myself during my journey, I may not have graduated. ***Sometimes the longer the wait, the sweeter the victory.***

Lesson Learned:

Most fruits are more enjoyable, the longer they are allowed to ripen. Similarly, we reap the greatest rewards when we have had to wait a little longer to see them come to past. The delay or frustration is just a set up for a sweeter victory.



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Chapter 3



Chapter 3: Uncomfortable

To be or not be? This is the question I sometimes ask myself about being comfortable. What is the best environment for success? I am a firm believer that our greatest growth occurs in environments and situations where we are uncomfortable. In these environments, we tend to withstand tests that stretch our self-belief, skill sets, and motivation. Most of us have been in situations where we had two choices: fight or flight. When we choose to fight, we reap the maximum rewards.

I can think of a handful of situations that helped me develop when I chose to live in an uncomfortable state. Sometimes we can only reach our dreams through the discomfort.

Uncomfortable

After almost ten years of studying and working in the USA, I decided to move back home to Barbados. When I made my decision, I had no job offers, and Raya34 Sports Inc. was not operational in regards to programming. I had no idea what I was going to do when I returned home. Fast forward to a couple of years when I resigned from a full-time job without an alternative. Although both of these examples were uncomfortable, they were the silver linings; moving back home and regaining my peace of mind definitely proved to be the positives.

However, moving home also carried its struggles of learning how to operate in a relatively new environment. I spent most of my teen years in the USA, and my first non-family jobs were in the USA. Simply put, the cultures are different, and this was an adjustment once I started to work. Leaving a job without a plan B and then having to deal with Covid-19, also presented another level of discomfort.

Uncomfortable

Another example of embracing discomfort occurs every time I lead a session in the Raya34 Sports Inc. Mentorship Program or when I make a group presentation. I love working with and speaking with the youth, but there is just something about public speaking that intimidates me. Every time I make a presentation or hold a session, I count it as a win in my confidence column.



Throughout each of these situations, I decided to embrace the discomfort. In my time of discomfort, I was able to grow Raya34 Sports Inc., learn more about myself, win small victories, and set new goals. ***Be comfortable being uncomfortable.***

Lesson Learned:

Embrace every moment, whether it is comfortable or uncomfortable. After the valley, there is a mountain. During times of comfort, it is easier to become complacent, to stop growing, and to stop looking for opportunities. There is always a lesson to be learned. If we always avoid the fight, we will never learn the lessons available in the struggle. Our attitude has a significant influence on our success. We can choose to see the uncomfortable situation as an opportunity to learn more about ourselves and to push ourselves to the next level.



Chapter 4



Chapter 4: Dreams



What does it mean to dream or to have dreams? We are familiar with the saying “Dream Big,” but what does that really mean? To dream is to have a vision of what you want to achieve, even if it is unseen and unimaginable to others. I have always been a dreamer. At eight years old, I dreamed of playing football overseas, although I saw very few women playing football. As I got older, my dreams shifted, and I dreamed of being a life changer. I wanted to have a real impact on the lives of others. Countless people paid it forward to me, and I wanted to do the same for others.

Dreams

I remember standing up during one of my graduate school programs and proclaiming I was going to found a non-profit organisation to help with youth development using sports. At the time, it was merely a dream. Although I was pursuing my MBA and a Masters in Sport Business Management, I had no idea what it meant to start a company; furthermore, how to run one, but I had a dream. Sometimes, I felt like an imposter, believing that I could create and operate my own company, and even more importantly, be successful. Maybe my imposter syndrome was fueled by my thoughts that I was too reserved and my dislike for public speaking. Luckily, for me, I have a great support system that encouraged me to keep believing in my dream.

Dreams



I took the first step and started researching non-profit incorporation and management. Shortly thereafter, I had started the incorporation process. In February 2017, Raya34 Sports Inc. was incorporated, and I was one step closer to accomplishing my dream. Fast forward to 2020, and Raya34

Sports Inc. is now thriving and my dream is becoming a reality. I am happy I did not let my fears stop me from pursuing my passion nor deter me from working to make a difference. ***Whatever your dream, start where you are.***

Lesson Learned:

We do not have to wait until we have perfected our plan or have gained “enough” confidence to get started. Sometimes we just need to step out and get started. The plan will begin to perfect itself and the fear of not being good or ready enough will slowly begin to fade away as you win one victory at a time.



Chapter 5



Chapter 5: Worth



When you think of your worth, what do you visualize? Is it the degrees you've earned, your experiences, your awards, your perspective, or even your smile? Only you can determine what you are worth. Over the last couple of years, between living in the USA and moving back home to Barbados, I have learned a lot about myself: what I value, what I will accept, and especially what I will not condone. I have learned to treasure my worth.

Worth

Why is knowing your worth crucial? Knowing your worth gives you power. It gives you the ability to stand up for yourself, to fight for your dreams, and it even helps you wade through the valleys of life. Sometimes when others don't know their worth, you living the truth of what you are worth threatens them.

I have played football for over 20 years, which is over 75% of my life to date. I once limited my worth to what I do, i.e., play football. Now, my worth is based on how I see myself as a person, not what I do. Therefore, it is not situational. My value system, the lessons learned, my experiences, and all of my characteristics add to my value and increase my worth. Once you know your worth, you will be unafraid to ask for what you deserve (new job title, pay raise, respect, etc.), and you will not be scared to walk away from situations and people who threaten your value. ***Know your worth, and don't give others the power to make you doubt it.***

Lesson Learned:

Sometimes we are too consumed with what others think about us and the decisions we make. We let these decisions determine how we view ourselves and even how we live. I have learned that the only person that has the power to determine my worth and how I feel about myself is me. Knowing my worth motivates me to be the very best version of myself and to never settle for less than I deserve.



Conclusion

Faith, Patience, Uncomfortable, Dreams, and Worth are all nouns that have helped me along my journey to triumph over life's ups and downs. I hope that they have inspired you to conquer whatever comes your way.

Remember:

*Don't limit yourself because of what you do not know.
Step out in faith.*

Sometimes the longer the wait, the sweeter the victory.

Be comfortable being uncomfortable.

Whatever your dream, start where you are.

*Know your worth, and don't give others the power to
make you doubt it.*

Conclusion

If these reflections have touched or inspired you, please support Raya34 Sports Inc. Through our programs, we inspire the younger generation and help them develop the skills and mentality to navigate life.

About the Author



As an 11-year-old, Soraya Toppin-Herbert became the first girl to captain an all-boys soccer team in a national school final in Barbados. She has had many successes in and through football from an early age. Soraya first represented Barbados in

Women's soccer at 13 years old with their Under 20 Women's team. At 15 years old, Soraya not only made her senior team debut, but she also scored her first international goal. Moving on to tertiary education, she started her journey at Purdue University as a soccer scholarship athlete. There, she played for four years, earning Academic All-Big Ten and Big Ten Distinguished Scholar Awards for three years.

About the Author

The holder of a Bachelor of Science in Movement and Sport Sciences with a minor in Law and Society, a Master of Business Administration, and a Master of Sport Business Management, Soraya is the founder and executive director of Raya34 Sports Inc. Through mentorship programs and sport skill programs, Raya34 Sports Inc. uses the power of sport to empower and develop the younger generation.

Soraya is a dream chaser who has hit several roadblocks along the way. Using these experiences, she reflects and shares some of the lessons learned to help inspire you to chase your dreams and live your best life.



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Live your best life!

As an 11-year-old Soraya Toppin-Herbert became the first girl to captain an all boys soccer team to a national final in Barbados. At seventeen she started her journey at Purdue University as a soccer scholarship athlete, where she played for four years. Soraya is a dream chaser who has hit several roadblocks along the way. Using these experiences she reflects and shares some of the lessons learned to help inspire you to chase your dreams and live your best life.