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### The Power of Perseverance

In Bill Strickland's memoir, *Make the Impossible Possible*, there are many defining character strengths that he possesses. The CEO of Manchester-Bidwell, a job training program and arts center for youth located in inner-city Pittsburgh, had one quality that stuck out to me, perseverance. The VIA website defines perseverance as, "the voluntary continuation of a goal-directed action despite the presence of challenges, difficulties, and discouragement." The author shares a multitude of inspiring stories and refreshing perspectives that not only teach a lesson, but also show his defining quality of being able to overcome problems and difficulties. Bill Strickland is a man that can rise from the ashes and make the best out of any situation. He never once backed down from achieving the things that satisfied his passions. Bill Strickland's inspiring and insightful story showed that he possessed great perseverance and he was able to overcome both abstract and physical obstacles to live a life that he would be proud of at the end of the day.

Throughout Strickland's memoir, he gives the reader insight into his past and shows how he overcame the negative environment he grew up in while living in Manchester. There are multiple times that the author could have let himself fall into the pit of despair that seemed to encompass his hometown, but he pushed through and didn't let the negativity get to him. Strickland grows up in a place that doesn't encourage kids to follow their dreams and go after their passions, they just let them fall into the same cycle that devours one young soul after another. Instead of falling victim and risk losing sight of his character, Bill learns to overcome

these things that plague his surroundings. There are multiple different times that Strickland could've gave up, but he keeps going and rises to the challenge every time. He wants to be proud of the man he looks back at in the mirror and be the kind of man that's able to overcome abstract obstacles.

At the beginning of the memoir the author describes Manchester as “an unbroken landscape of decay that taught indelible lessons about hopelessness and defeat no matter where my gaze fell” (29). It's clear that Manchester was one of Bill Strickland's biggest obstacles that weighed on his heart and weakened his character. One of the ways he begins to overcome this obstacle is with the simplicity of clay. In chapter two, Strickland tells us the origins of where his love for clay came from. In high school, with the help of Mr. Ross, the author can find hope within the art of clay and it gives him a kind of awakening. “The joy of working with clay showed me what it was like to feel truly alive, and I wanted to sustain that feeling. I wanted to push back the darkness a little and make some room for my spirit to breathe” (43). Strickland ran with that feeling of character quality and soon started entering his art into different shows in Pittsburgh. He seemingly pushed himself out of the despair of the ghetto and it was as if he was ready to define his life on his own terms. “My senses seemed keener, colors seemed brighter, I felt a lightness of spirit I'd never know before. It was the simple joy of being alive, and it gave me a whole new perspective on who I was” (48). Strickland goes on to graduate high school, create the Craftsmen's Guild, graduate the University of Pittsburgh, and then he finds himself at the Bidwell Training Center.

Shortly after graduating college, Bill Strickland landed himself a job running the Bidwell Training Center. He wanted to turn the place around and give the people of the ghetto a chance to turn their lives around. Strickland made countless attempts to make the Bidwell Training

Center a place that welcomed students and made them feel like they were more than the darkness the ghetto tried to convince them they were. He cleaned the building up, straightened up the employees, and even connected with IBM to make a new training program, but Bidwell's financial needs seemed to make things hopeless. Soon the stress began to weigh on Bill and his sense of character faded into the darkness. "My mood turned dark. I was difficult to be around. I had forced myself to show up at the office. The only place I felt like myself was in the dim light of the Shamrock Inn, a neighborhood bar" (86). All hope seemed lost, but Strickland's perseverance shined through like a beacon of hope. He muscled up some courage and with his enlightened character he started to find funding throughout his impressive network of friends. Strickland built a whole entire new building, ran on dreams and passion. The new building was called Manchester Bidwell, and Bill Strickland wouldn't had been able to overcome the abstract obstacle of his doubt and self-pity without his will to persevere. "my whole life led up to this place, how my restless quest to live a life that mattered had forced me to mine a lifetime of emotional experience, make sense of it, draw a vision from it, then find the knowledge, skill partnerships, and perseverance I needed to make that vision real" (103). Not all the author's obstacles were all abstract, and he was also faced with physical challenges.

Throughout his memoir, Strickland was constantly plagued with physical difficulties. When it came to the author going after his dreams and developing his passions, there were many different things that seemed to stand in his way. Bill Strickland had the dream of building a beacon of hope right in Manchester, and the journey to making this beacon a reality was often halted by funding and government issues. There were many physical things that got in the way of Bill's dreams, but he persevered and didn't let anything get in the way of his vision. When Strickland put his mind to something, he was likely to achieve it. At the end of the day Bill

wanted to live a life he was proud of and the life involved jumping over a few obstacles on the way.

One of the major things the author overcame was funding issues with a side of government issues. Towards the end of the book Strickland had become infatuated with the idea of orchids and decided that Manchester Bidwell needed a greenhouse. He wanted to share his passion of orchids with the community and let them embrace the flowers beauty. “I didn’t know how I would make this happen, but as soon as those images became real to me, my mind opened up to the future this dream might offer—the possibility of new opportunities, new relationships, new ways to broaden and deepen the effectiveness of my school” (130). At the time of the developed passion, nobody even fathomed that a greenhouse would become a part of Manchester Bidwell, but Bill Strickland fought hard and long for it. The only thing he needed to go through with the project was the money to build a new sense of inspiration for the students of the center. They eventually won the support of a senator, but they had to wait for the bill for the grant to pass to begin construction. When the bill wasn’t appearing for voting Bill and his team marched straight down to D.C., and they were able to get the bill passed. If Strickland would have just sat around and waited to get the bill to pass, he might never had been to see a shiny new greenhouse at his center. “In everyone of those cases, I faced setback, heartbreaks, and years of unfulfilled struggle. But I couldn’t give up. Struggle is part of the equation when you bet your hopes on a passion, but the passion also makes the effort worthwhile” (166). Strickland overcame the physical obstacle of funding issues and government issues to live a life he was proud of.

Another one of the funding issues on the author’s long list of physical struggles was his fight to have a jazz music hall. One of Bill Strickland’s biggest passions was jazz and he wanted to give the people of Manchester the opportunity to be saved by the music, the same way he was.

He fought and fought for funding, but many times his fight was answered with, “I’m sorry, Bill, I still can’t give you money for a jazz hall,” (182). However, with some intuition and perseverance Bill found a way to get his jazz hall. He had to compromise, but his constant persistence was soon answered with, “But doesn’t a school like yours need an auditorium?” (182). They got their money and instead of making a boring old auditorium, Strickland constructed a, “auditorium that just so happened to feature outstanding acoustical qualities and professional-caliber recording facilities” (182). The author was able to make “Jazz at the Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild” a complete success and famous jazz artists from all over came to perform on Bill’s stage. Strickland’s perseverance for the jazz hall was able to put Manchester Bidwell on the map, and he was truly proud of a life he had made improving Manchester one risk at a time.

Bill Strickland is the pinnacle of people who have persevered through life. Strickland grew up in the ghetto where people were blockaded by the thought that they would never amount to anything. The author was able to persevere and turn his life around, even though he was constantly being put down by the darkness of the ghetto. Once Strickland was on the path to greatness, the struggle didn’t stop there. He was constantly plagued with the hopelessness of Manchester, but he was bound and determined to create a beacon of hope for the people that were lost in the shuffle. Strickland almost let the negativity of the ghetto defeat him, but he persevered and was able to go after his passions. He was able to turn around Manchester Bidwell, a place with almost no funding, and make it into something that would influence change. Bill Strickland’s inspiring and insightful story showed he possessed great perseverance and he was able to overcome both abstract and physical obstacles to live a life that he would be proud of at the end of the day.