

“A set-back doesn't matter, what does is how you deal with it”

If there is somebody who knows what it means to work hard to survive than that is Joy van der Stel (33) from Arnhem in the Netherlands. Due to a lack of oxygen during her birth she was born severely spastic. Despite her disability she refused to lead a life needing help from others. Her positive attitude has not only resulted in a completely independent life; meanwhile she also inspires numerous companies, institutions and private people with training, coaching and advice. Her company EmpowerMij is convincing proof that you can thrust back the frontiers with willpower. During the symposium NSM3 in Hilversum she managed to get all participants speechless with her life-story.



‘Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.’ This expression from Einstein is not placed without reason on Joy van der Stel’s website. Her passion for life and her ability to believe in opportunities instead of restrictions have made sure that she amazed her surrounding time after time with the steps she took. She stays extremely down-to-earth: “If you just accept things you know for sure that nothing will change. I want to decide for myself how I am leading my life. To accomplish this I had to fight against prejudice ever since I was young. Tough but I never give up. My device is always: if it doesn't work going to the right then you simply try it going to the left. Do you want to bet that you are then capable of more than you think you are?”

The power of change

For Joy especially one question counts: “Are you starting from your impossibilities or your possibilities?” Positively she continues: “The point is how you look at things. The problem is that a set-back doesn't matter, what does is how you deal with it. The impossibilities I have encountered in



my life have enriched it. What's more; they make up my source of energy. I can't imagine a life without a physical disability. I am not disabled, that's only in your head. A disability is in your body but you can do something about that. There are solutions and aids with which you can direct your own life. This is something I always chose deliberately and worked very hard for."

This kind of thinking was also central during her reading at the symposium in Hilversum. "Of course I am not a real estate expert," she laughs somewhat apologetic. "But I do think I know what agents are going through at the moment. Problematic times lead to dullness and doubt. Pretty understandable but doom watch doesn't help. If people believe in their own strengths they can change situations substantially and get things done their way. The power of change is especially found in believing in yourself. I am the living proof of this."

Growth through disappointment

For Joy disappointments are moments of growth. "Even with let-downs you have the choice of how you interpret this experience: someone will think of it as a failure, another will be satisfied that he at least tried. The life I now lead wasn't just given to me. I fought for it step by step by not thinking in restrictions." This positive attitude has given Joy a lot. "My parents taught me that I am responsible for my own life. They realized that growing up in a rehabilitation center would not give me enough incentives to develop into an independently functioning person. I had special schooling but always opposed to the attitude that they did not need to teach me anything since I was going to be a 'client' who's activities needed supervising anyway." Thanks to her unrestrained commitment Joy got a diploma, arranged for her own home and started her own company. In the meantime, she is a much demanded speaker at conferences and leading companies and institutions call on her talent. Also her private life is treating her well. "Next to being a counselor, coach and trainer I am also a mother. Already during my pregnancy I looked around to find possibilities to take care of my child myself in

my wheelchair. In shops for special aids and appliances I ran up against a regular wall of unwillingness. The result was that my partner and an architect friend designed wheelchair-friendly furniture. Again this resulted from the thought 'if you really want something you will succeed in achieving it'."



Program yourself positively

Joy's work method is amongst others based on neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), which describes the dynamic between our brain (neuron) and language (linguistic) and how this interaction in our body will influence emotions and behavior. "In practice this means that we adjust our perceptions in a way which suits us. We see what we want to see and we hear what we want to hear. I am convinced that it all is connected with each other." During trainings Joy teaches people to listen to their intuition. "There is nothing levititious about that," she laughs. "By taking on the responsibility for everything that goes right or wrong people learn to deal with the ups and downs. During the symposium I noticed how a part of the real estate agents complained about recession and crisis, whereas others listed the possibilities of how to get out of it. It is true that the market collapsed but more important is how you get out of this situation again. Here too it is important that the problem is how you deal with this fact. In the swamp of impossibilities, are you ready to search for new ways to move on? There are always people wanting to move houses. I say: do something and believe in your talents. If it doesn't work out then, be honest with yourself and find something else to do and don't get stuck in something which doesn't make you happy. Something like this doesn't 'happen' to you, it's your own decision."

Business woman of the year

In the meantime banks, ministries, communities, universities and (care) institutions regularly call on Joy's talents. She has also written a book with the title 'The power of my disability'. It does not take her long to think of the answer to the question where she sees herself in five years. "I hope to inspire more and more people with my story. To become the business woman of the year would be the biggest reward for me. Not only because I would be the first woman with a visible disability but also because it would allow me to buy a house. Right now we are living in a tiny, rented flat with our daughter because due to my disability I can't easily qualify for a mortgage. However, if I ever get this far at least I now know enough real estate agents which I can contact."

