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**“Reaching Your Dreams By Choosing Optimism”**

My watch reads 2:30 pm. I'm halfway through a 12-hour shift. A few months ago, I would get nervous if I even heard the word "job." I was enthused about working and earning a paycheck but fearful of making mistakes. Job listings include requirements such as possessing strong communication skills and multi-tasking in a fast-paced environment. I have a history of misunderstanding instructions in school, which causes me to look bad in front of classmates or gives teachers the impression I am not trying. Due in part to my ADHD, I usually need more time to process information than a timed test or on-the-spot question in class allows. In a rare moment of courage, I fill out applications. After applying for a few positions and following up with phone calls and in person without success, I decided to take a break from job-hunting.

Out of nowhere, my mother handed me an application for a local farm festival. I figured, what do I have to lose. To my surprise, I received a call the next day and after an interview was hired! Part of me was celebrating while the other part was a nervous wreck. Many thoughts were racing in my head like what if I mess up or get fired? Those two concerns kept me up all night. Determined to be prepared, I read the lengthy employee handbook.

The next day I arrive at the farm, pick up my official shirt and name tag, and my boss assigns me to the kettle corn booth. Immediately I think I'll falter since this requires me to prepare and sell food simultaneously. Fortunately, someone was there to train me. I was a bit slow at first, but after a while, I got the hang of it. Once I viewed this as a three-step operation, it became less overwhelming. Make the kettle corn, bag the kettle corn, and sell the kettle corn.

Making the kettle corn was straightforward. I added oil to a massive pot and waited for it to boil. Next, I poured in the sugar and corn kernels. Then I would stir the mixture, which would clump together to give it that sweet, sugary taste and aroma. Mixing was not exactly pleasant. After a short time, the corn would start popping, and the hot oil began to splash everywhere, burning me in the process. The ear-piercing sounds from the pot signaled when it was finished. I poured the kettle corn onto a tray and mixed it around so it wouldn't stick together. Finally, I would sprinkle salt on the kettle corn and give it one last toss to honor the "Sweet and Salty Kettle Corn" sign hanging overhead. Bagging the kettle corn was no walk in the park either. Sometimes the bags would rip, or the kettle corn would be so hot that it would melt through the bags' bottom. Selling was challenging at first because scanning a credit card took multiple attempts. I'd either scan too fast or too slow. My other hesitation was whether or not I would be able to easily engage with customers. The anxiety that accompanies my ADHD sometimes impacts my ability to feel confident in social settings and finding the right words in person sometimes escapes me. After a couple of days, I was proficient in making, bagging, and selling kettle corn and enjoying ringing up and interacting with customers.

My two co-workers and I would perform these steps, alternating tasks throughout the day, which taught me the value of effective communication and the benefit of working as a team. Without the three of us relying on each other to do our part, we would easily be overwhelmed by customers. Another thing I learned was that it was okay to make mistakes. My greatest apprehension about finding a job was losing it. After a couple of blunders, such as keeping the boiling pot on for too long or adding too much sugar, I no longer get frustrated with myself. I now understand that errors are all part of learning and improving.

My initial feelings of fear and trepidation disappeared and were now replaced by elation and pride. My two biggest fears about pursuing my first job turned out to be minor inconveniences I overcame by being optimistic, having confidence in my abilities, and stepping out of my comfort zone.

