Our team, competing in the Asian Final of the Space City Design Competition, reached a critical moment: we were only one step away from qualifying for the Global Final, as long as we won over the other three teams.

However, we were much closer to a team collapse than to success.

“I’m fed up. It’s all over now!” I typed furiously in our family group chat, “I have been working so hard for this, but now it’s all ruined!” It was 1 a.m., and I was in New Delhi, nearly 4,000 kilometers away from home. As I looked around, there was no one but me in the meeting room, struggling to pull through the challenging task. Immersed in mixed feelings of frustration and anxiety, fragments of my past years rose before me.

Similar stress and negative emotions have haunted me ever since I entered junior high school. Joining the best class in the grade, my everyday life has been packed with endless classes, assignments, and tests. Throughout the years, I have become used to setting other people’s expectations, including my parents and teachers, as my “beacon.” The never-ending pursuit of good grades gradually transformed into an insatiable craving for external recognition. However, all the contest certificates, excellent exam scores, and others’ compliments only masked a profound inward emptiness: What do I truly want to do? What is my purpose in life? Why do I feel so tense and unmotivated?

Then came the transformative epiphany when I participated in the Space City Design Competition. Instantly, when I signed up for this competition, I felt unprecedented excitement while picturing myself bringing my creative ideas of constructing a space city to life. It was the first time I put aside my regular coursework and engaged in a hands-on experience out of pure interest. Until today, I can still vividly recall the thrilling sensation of being elected to be the leader of the Automatic Group. The first few hours of teamwork went smoothly, but the situation took a dramatic turn after we lost connection with the original team leader in another city due to technical issues.

When the team was on the verge of collapsing, I took over the role of team leader. I would not deny that a shiver of panic rose in my heart as I realized that my responsibility was now extended. It was indeed an overwhelming experience, especially when I sat alone in the empty room, feeling engulfed by the pressure and the enormous sense of responsibility.

As I glanced at the pile of draft papers and blueprints filled with scribbled calculations on the desk, they reminded me of all the passionate dreams interwoven into our space city project. At that exact moment, a flicker of intrinsic motivation was sparked within me, dispelling my gloomy feelings. Scenes of us brainstorming, sharing innovative ideas, and encouraging each other during setbacks kept rising before my eyes. I regained my strength by recalling my pure enthusiasm at the beginning of the competition.

Guided by the new-found inherent passion, I overcame my negative emotions and took the first step by reaching out to each member with encouraging words, restoring their confidence. Little by little, a single catalyst eventually started a “prairie fire.” We worked tirelessly for the next couple of hours and ended up finishing a fantastic spaceport design after overcoming great obstacles.

When the time of submission was up, I hit the “submit” button and felt a sense of fulfillment stronger than I had ever experienced before. The result, or put in another way, the external factors, were no longer important. What mattered most was my precious journey of self-reflection and growth.

As I shut down my computer, the once-empty room was filled with cherished memories. Guided by my inner callings, I knew for certain: there would be no dreams too big, and no frontiers beyond reach.