“I quit!” Someone suddenly snapped in the Discord server. His profile pic turned grey, and he soon went offline. Absolute quiet prevailed in the room as I removed my glasses and rubbed my eyes in distress. Now, with a 5-hour countdown, it was critical for me, the team leader, to turn the tide and set things right.

It dates back to this February when I attended a Space City Design Competition held by NASA. Upon being qualified to compete in the Asian Region Final, we were assigned to design a spaceport located at the Third Lagrange Point in 48 hours.

Initially, I was elected to be the leader of the Automatic Group, and the first few hours went smoothly. However, a wave of pessimism and frustration swept our team as we lost communication with the team leader in another city, Chongqing. The whole team soon slid into chaos when some of the teammates lost faith in our team due to the technical issues.

When the team was on the verge of collapsing, I took over the role of a team leader. I would not deny that a shiver of panic arose in my heart as I realized that my responsibility now extended. All of a sudden, there was an overwhelming amount of things to consider: the chaotic communication process, my teammates’ mental state, the clear team objectives, and so much more. It was two in the morning, and I sent the exhausted teammates all to sleep, except two other group leaders.

“Alright,” I tried to sound as confident as possible, “I know the situation is not ideal, but let’s work together to…”

“It’s over now. I quit.” Before I could even finish, one of the leaders said.

“Wait, we still have a chance of winning.” Though I repeatedly asked them to stay, they left the group chat without hesitation.

I remember sitting in the empty room for a long time, engulfed by a mixture of emotions. The pressure and the enormous sense of responsibility were suffocating. I glanced at the pile of draft papers and blueprints filled with scribbled calculations on the desk, and 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 teammates’ initial enthusiasm and the sparkle of expectation in their eyes.

I took the first step by reaching out to each and every remaining member with sincere words, restoring their confidence. Little by little, a single spark eventually started a “prairie fire.” And an unprecedented positive team atmosphere awoke.

We worked tirelessly for the next couple of hours, with each member bringing their unique skills and creative ideas to the table. The whole team worked incredibly efficiently after I carefully reallocated the tasks based on each member’s strengths and skill sets. I also focused on emphasizing the shared goals and keeping the whole team on track.

The clock ticked away. We refined our design, prepared our presentation, and looked for any potential flaws in our final project. Despite the great obstacles encountered, we ended up finishing a spaceport design that was not only functional but also innovative. When the time of submission was up, I hit the “submit” button with a mixture of exhaustion and pride. At this point, the result was no longer important. What mattered most was our precious journey: turning from a group of strangers to a tight-knit team.

As I shut down my computer, a sense of fulfillment washed over me. The once-empty room was now filled with cherished memories of all the struggles and triumphs. And I will keep moving forward, knowing that despite tremendous challenges, the unwavering determination could always illuminate the path ahead.