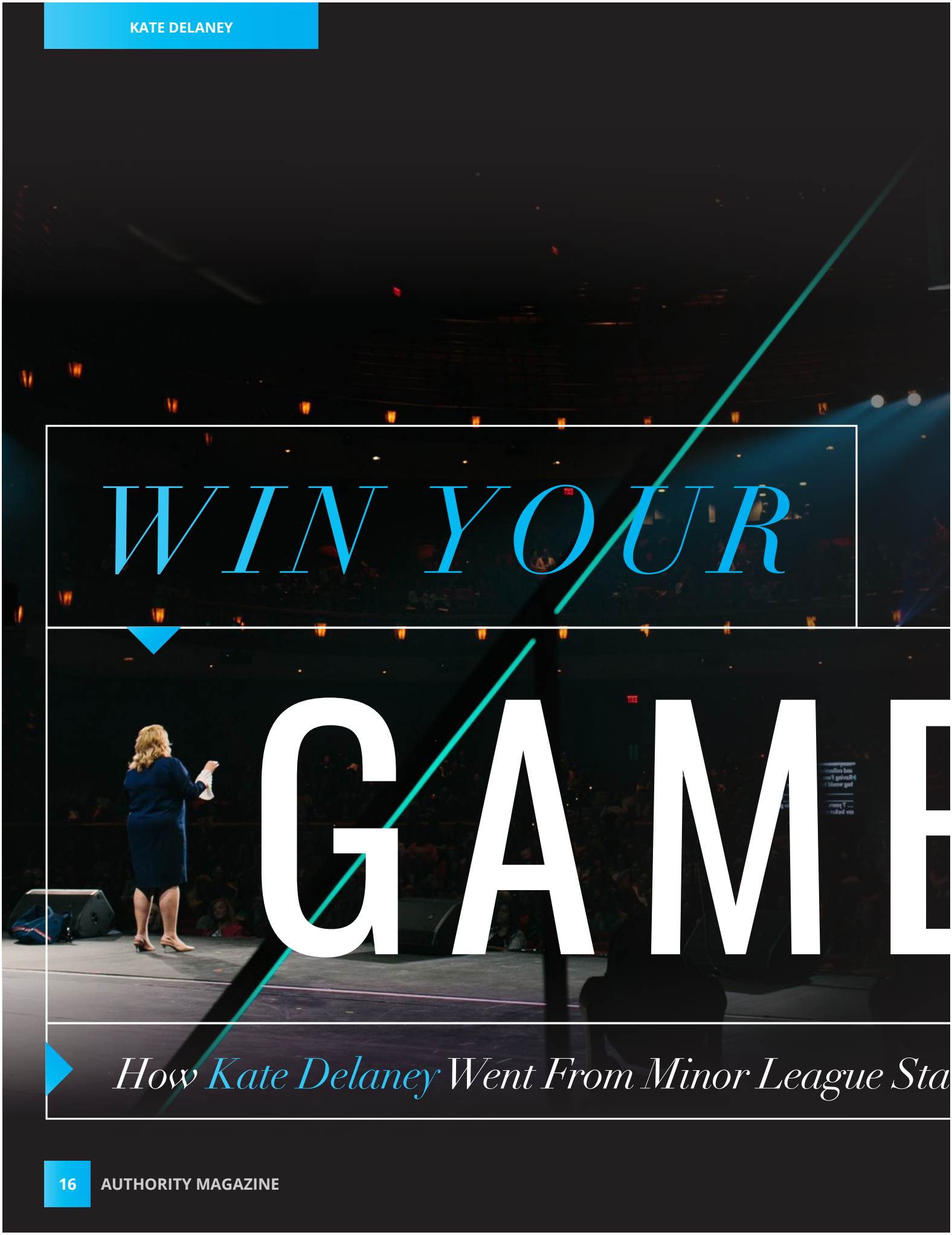

WIN YOUR GAME

How Kate Delaney Went From Minor League Sta

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rt To National Talk Show Host | BY ELAINE BEST

AFTER ALMOST 500 REJECTIONS, Kate Delaney finally had her chance. She stood in the Dallas Cowboys locker room, surrounded by 70 half-dressed male athletes, the only woman in the room. Prepared to dive into the work she had dreamed of starting for years, she poised herself for her next big interview.

And then, her microphone slipped out of her hands and hit the floor.

The path to Delaney's illustrious career as a sports anchor and talk show host was arduous, to say the least. As a woman in a predominantly male field, Delaney had an uphill climb that few of her colleagues had to experience.

"Once, an anchor friend told me if I was *Kevin* Delaney instead of Kate, I'd already be settled into a sports anchor job in a Top Ten market," Delaney says.

Yet, it was Delaney who went on to interview LeBron James, four former U.S. presidents, and 16,000-plus other guests on her talk show. She was one of the first women to ever host a solo sports radio talk show in a Top Ten market, and she is now also an author and professional speaker.

"There's no question I was pursuing a job in a very male dominated field. Being female held me back," Delaney says. "I will say that men did try to help me—they just weren't the gatekeepers. Countless men recommended me or stayed late to help me cut some sports highlights on the set. I had a hammer and a few guys helping me swing it. But, I couldn't crack the glass ceiling."

To better understand the obstacles Delaney faced in the early 2000s, consider these news statistics from the past few years. In 2015, 62.1 percent of reporters were men while only 37.9 percent were women (ASNE). According to the Women's Media Center 2019 report, sports desks at 75 of the nation's newspapers and online news sites earned a "D+" for gender and racial diversity and a sixth consecutive "F" for "lack of gender equality."

But Delaney hustled despite the odds. She caught on that TV crews would stay after shooting for the price of some pizza, where she could then film her own segments. She was ready whenever a network needed her to fill in for someone. For years, she kept on her track ruthlessly, which eventually led to her Roger Blaimere.

"He heard me fill-in and the rest was history, eventually leading to my sports talk radio show," Delaney says.

In that Dallas Cowboys locker room, with a room full of men staring at Delaney and the microphone at her feet, she had two choices: give up or power through. We know how her story ends, so after years of tireless work, multiple jobs, sexism and 500-some rejections, what kept her going?

"Damn sports bug," Delaney jokes. "I just couldn't live with the 'R' word: Regret."

One pivotal moment stands out in Delaney's mind when she realized she would regret giving up her sports career aspirations. She was wrapping up a radio show on the Central Coast of California when an advertiser at the station offered her a position to be an investment banker.

"This wasn't something I hadn't heard before from boyfriends, friends and family who wanted me to leave the rejection behind for a safe job that offered financial security," Delaney says. "Honestly, I think at that moment in Santa Maria, California, with my radio cans in my hand, walking to the car, I knew that I would never give up. I thought if I hung in long enough, I would get a job in sports on television or radio. I decided I would rather live with rejection rather than regret."

"So, I stuck it out," Delaney says.

Sticking it out soon came with its costs, however. Well-meaning family and friends continued to urge Delaney to consider going into "safer" career options such as banking or law. Their opinions were so persistent that Delaney ended up taking the law entrance exam, which she passed with flying colors.

"I learned that people can be very persuasive, especially when they are your advocates," Delaney told her audience at The Insiders Summit at ForbesBooks. "Everyone thought I would end up going to the University of Pennsylvania, or one of these big schools. And boy, was I really headed in that direction, even though I *knew* I wanted to go into sports."

Later, another well-intentioned friend in the sports business told Delaney that she was wasting her time pursuing a career in sports journalism. All the jobs will go to the men, and Delaney was throwing away her "prime years."

"I spent the weekend at a friend's beach house shortly after that and really debated my options. All the side hustles, long hours and lack of positive response started to take a toll," Delaney states.

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Many times, Delaney was the only woman in the locker room. Once, when she was waiting to interview John Burkett, the pitcher for the Texas Rangers at the time, a famous pitcher came in on roller blades yelling, "What is she doing here? No women should be here."

"Lucky for me, Burkett arrived and shut him down," Delaney says. "A lot of the time, I was trying to blend in, not stick out."

The constant rejections did not make her career path easier, either. Delaney recalls she would hold on to her rejections mentally like a bag that ended up weighing her down. For a time, she used this "bag of rejections" as her drive for her work with the intention of proving all those people wrong. While some people may think an "I'll show you" attitude can be their main motivator, Delaney suggests moving beyond the rejections to find a more stable source of drive.

"Rejection is tough, but not insurmountable. Deal with it and move on as fast as you can. Dwelling makes it worse, and while it can act as an elixir, it can also wear down your resistance," Delaney states.

In the end, the "bag of rejections" was not her most lasting source of motivation. It was her raving fans, whom Delaney notes are vital to have when pursuing your chosen destiny.

"Was the bag of rejections motivating me not to give up? Perhaps. Today, I would argue I should have thrown them away and focused on what my raving fans were telling me," she says.

According to Delaney, the best way to start gathering your own raving fans is to collect any medals, awards, pictures, positive emails, etc. into a bag or box and keep them near you as you work.

"Pull that box out and use that for motivation to keep going. Write down what it will look like to get where you want to be or what you'd like to attain. Tracking success along the way to the big goal is so key," she says.

Delaney reflects on her early career and how some obstacles could have been made easier if she had decided to focus more on her supporters.

"I would have surrounded myself with those raving fans who were trying to help me or saw something in me that worked. I also would have reached out higher faster. I was confident and unafraid, but maybe I was playing too small. Why not take a big leap and call everyone I could possibly find in a big market? Perhaps I would have gotten lucky with the right mentor or influencer who could have helped with some of the objections," Delaney says.

We are all capable of so much more than we imagine.

Shoot high and who knows where you'll end up.

Delaney refers to finding these mentors and influencers as "stacking the deck" in your favor. She details this ideology in her book *Deal Your Own Destiny*, and states the importance of building up your own raving fans.

"I am shocked at the amount of people who don't have a mentor. There is nothing like finding the right one—someone who will tell you the truth as they see it and really get invested in the outcome of your success," Delaney says. "Imagine a group of people offering unfiltered ideas to whatever business or personal obstacle you are facing that's getting in your way. I'll say it again: we all need raving fans. There is nothing like the card, email, call or text of encouragement or congratulations to help keep you pumped up."

As a starting point to find your raving fans, Delaney recommends creating a list of every person you have ever encountered in your life.

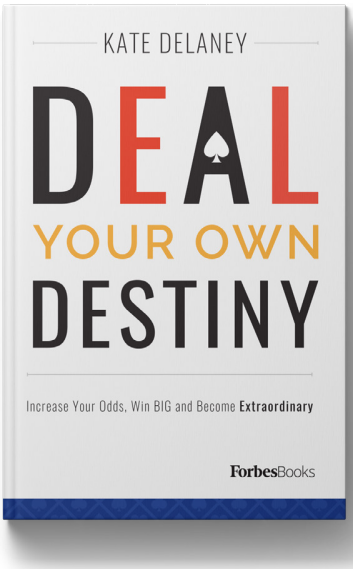
"This first part is hard and I've heard it makes some people cry. I guarantee there are people you've forgotten who would love to hear from you and might even help you in some way. Then, we'd draw a road map of where you want to be and work backwards to see who could help or steer you in the right direction," Delaney says.

Along with having a strong support system, Delaney stresses the importance of continued education to further advance your ability to control your own future.

"Keep learning. Conferences, books, courses, podcasts... There are so many ways to keep your mind open to new ideas, new technologies or perhaps a twist on something you're already doing that can increase your bottom line," Delaney says.

Delaney found that as she continued to pursue her own destiny, new challenges and tests appeared, daring her to question the path she had chosen.

"The 'drop the mic' moments are the ultimate tests to see if you have what it takes," Delaney explains. "Hanging in when it's tough builds character. It takes courage to stay the course and pursue your passion. If you reach for the escape hatch, then you really weren't invested in going all in."



Delaney warns that it will not only be your career that will test you along the way. Your personal life can be just as trying in the pursuit of your goal.

"If you truly want to deal your own destiny, then getting to whatever your ultimate locker room is probably won't be easy. The door might get stuck, stay closed or take a long time to open. Many of my C-Suite friends or those who are founders and CEOs have told me some equally hair-raising stories about what they weathered to realize their destiny. Bankruptcy, sad divorces, laying off favorite employees and much more. The road to success is paved with many potholes," Delaney says.

From Delaney's experience, the fear of facing these challenges is what holds many people back from switching careers or making bold moves in their lives. Often at her speaking events, Delaney will hear audience members say "It's too risky," or "I'm comfortable and safe where I am," or "It's too late." Delaney, however, thinks there is always an opportunity to take back control of your life.

"If you asked me what I wanted my destiny to be when I was a kid, I don't think it would look exactly like it does today. I think there's a day when you pick your head up and say, 'Oh hell, yeah, this is it baby.' There is nothing like that feeling," Delaney says.

She's had that feeling three times in her life: "When I got my first break in sports talk radio after all the rejection; when I gave my first big speech in front of thousands of people; and when my consulting/media company took off. Which is why I am crazy passionate about seeing people really pursue their dreams and not letting others and themselves get in the way. Destiny is like a jungle gym, you end up twisting in a lot of directions however if you combine flexibility with strength and resilience you'll get there."

Delaney pours this passion into her book which she hopes can act as a customizable road map to readers to go in their own direction. For her, it all boils down to believing that you can obtain your dream job and your ideal life.

"We are all capable of much more than we imagine," she says. "Shoot high and who knows where you'll end up."