“JUST NOD” 2025 Champion

Sabasachi Sangupta. Just nod. Just nod. Sabiasachi Sangupta.
[Applause]
Thank you, contest chair. You're welcome.

I love you so so much.
I was talking to the stage.
Uh if you're wondering, you should know what this stage does to us.
This is that one safe space where we can be creative, weird, wacky, right?
Give me a little “Hoo hoo!!” if you love the stage.
(Hoohoo)
I knew that. Because when we are up here, nothing else in this world matters except this stage, our craft, and our audience.
But do we often take this performer energy into our day-to-day lives?
Or we think the world will judge us, label us, maybe even laugh at us.

Contest Chair, Toast Masters and my performers in this room and all over the world. For me, finding this stage was not easy because I grew up in India where my dad told me I have three career options to be a doctor, engineer or be a disappointment.
But disappointment had its own hierarchy. Like if I'm in a corporate job, I am least disappointment. But I wanted to climb the Mount Everest of disappointment.

I wanted to be a Bollywood actor.
You know Bollywood actor, right? Fix the bulb, pat the dog. Fix the bulb, pat the dog.
That kind. But I never had the courage to tell my father because if I did, just like any other Indian dad, he would say, “Actor, somebody is going to get a beating.”
So I knew the dream to be an actor was too far.

But life like a Bollywood movie had its twists and turns and I ended up in a city called Amsterdam. And one day while I was attending a boring finance lecture, I thought what if I gave myself this chance to be an actor. Next day I skipped class and I went for an audition of a play Romeo and Juliet.
I wanted to be conservative so I went for the role of Romeo.
The director looked at me and said, "You want to be a Romeo?"
You know why? Because there were 20 other actors, tall, chisel jaw, and enthusiastic.
And there was me, enthusiastic.
“You want to be an actor? Okay, Mr. Bollywood, show me how would you propose to your Juliet?”
Showtime.
I looked at Juliet and said, "Oh Juliet, oh Juliet, you are the love of my life.
Your eyes are as pretty as river Ganga. Your figure is as perfect as the Taj Mahal.
Your breath is as fresh as Indian curry.
Tell me, Juliet, tell me, will you be mine? If your answer is yes, just nod.
But if your answer is no, just nod and I'll understand.
“Cut, cut, cut. Oh my god, you're the best actor. You deserve an Oscar.”
I believed him for 5 seconds. And then I saw everyone laughing.
Then I knew my dream to be an actor was definitely dead. I can never be a performer.

So I did what anybody with a broken dream in the city of Amsterdam would do.
Take up a job in finance.
Now finance professionals are really fun. They are curious. They are energetic, open to new ideas. You know, they only believe in data and numbers.

And I'm sure when they sleep at night, they sleep with a spreadsheet on.
[Applause]
And there I was crunching numbers, making Excel sheets, wearing blue and black suits to fit in.

And one day and also attending town halls, finance town halls that were as interesting as the Toastmasters annual general meetings, not the one from yesterday, from past years.
And one day we had to do a presentation within 24 hours notice and everybody panicked. Nobody knew what to do.
Something in me woke up the performer. I went to my manager and said, "Can I do the presentation?" “Are you sure, Sabi?”
(Bobble head) That was a yes, by the way.
Use the existing slides.
(Bobble head) That was a no. By the way,
I threw away those data heavy slides. I put on my red suit and I used a story that had opening connection, laughter.
And guess what? I saw my colleagues laugh for the first time. Agree. This never happens in finance. After the presentation, my manager came to me and said, "Dude, you should be the new CEO.”
“Promotion?.”
“No, chief entertainment officer. You do this so well. You should do more often. You should teach us."
These guys liked my performance. Like I thought to fit in finance, I need to be one of them, those blue suits. And that day, I unleashed the performer in me.
And people liked me. People like my performance.

And that's when it hit me. My friends, I do not need a movie set to live my dream. I can be a performer even in a boardroom with a clicker and a projector. A clicker and a projector.
My dear performers in the room, too
often we hold our energy, we hold our ideas because we think it's not appropriate for the room.

My dear performers, let's not do that. Let's unleash that ideas. Let's unleash the energy. Yes, some days you will be trolled. Some days you'll be rejected.
Some days you'll be made fun of. But trust me, some days you'll light up a room.
Someday you'll make someone's day. And who knows, someday you may even change someone's life.

So my dear performers, if life asks you, wherever you are, whichever stage you want to be on, ask you, are you ready? Just put on your red suit or put on your red dress. Step on this stage. Smile and just just nod.

Contest Chair.