



NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

TEAM MEMBERS: \_\_\_\_\_

## Case Study on Spencer West

(1 OF 1)

Spencer West has faced many obstacles in his lifetime, though he's never let it slow him down.

"I was born with a genetic disease that prevented the muscles in my legs from working," says West. "At the age of five, my legs were removed just below my pelvis so I could get around better. The doctors said I would never sit up or walk. They said I would never be a functioning member of society. But my family and I refused to accept that. Instead, we set out to redefine what was possible. With their support, I've overcome many obstacles."

Since then, West has lived to redefine possible, which is also the name he used to describe his mission to climb Mount Kilimanjaro in 2012. Every year, 25,000 people attempt to climb Mount Kilimanjaro, but only 10,000 people summit, making it to the peak. With odds against him, why would West and a few of his friends face down the highest mountain in Africa? His goal was to raise awareness for the millions of drought-affected people who lack access to clean water and to raise funds for clean water projects for communities in Kenya. In 2011, West made his sixth visit to Kenya to volunteer on development projects. While he was there, he witnessed the toll the recent drought had taken on the region. "I saw the failed crops. Once lush green maize fields now sat dried, brown and brittle. I saw the emaciation of the livestock, of many of the community members."

Since his first visit in 2002, West has felt a connection to Africa, and Kenya in particular. "People who I considered family [were] struggling. I wanted to give back to the continent that helped me find my heart."

While the challenge of climbing Mount Kilimanjaro came with some of the biggest obstacles West has ever had to overcome, a lifetime of facing obstacles — and always going above and beyond expectations — had prepared him. As West has said, "Obstacles are only

insurmountable when we're 'overcoming' them alone. They simply become exciting challenges when we overcome them together with friends or a team."

It's a team of friends and supporters — both before the climb and during — that he wholeheartedly credits for successfully summiting Africa's highest peak in June 2012. And his fundraising goal? He surpassed the initial goal of \$500,000 to raise \$750,000 for sustainable clean water projects in Kenya that would withstand the impact of future droughts.

From being a cheerleader in college, to contributing to development work in communities around the world, to inspiring thousands of people as a motivational speaker, West hopes to spread a powerful message:

***"We have the capacity to redefine the limits of our own potential. There is no can't or won't, only how."***

Watch and read more of West's story online:

- ▶ [WE.org/spencer-story](http://WE.org/spencer-story) and [WE.org/spencer-possible](http://WE.org/spencer-possible)
- ▶ [WE.org/spencer-spirit](http://WE.org/spencer-spirit) — West's journey to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro is documented to the sounds of "Spirit Indestructible," a song and written and performed by Nelly Furtado, who was inspired by West.
- ▶ [www.forbes.com/sites/davidmaris/2012/06/25/redefinepossible](http://www.forbes.com/sites/davidmaris/2012/06/25/redefinepossible)

Now discuss or answer in writing the following questions:

- ▶ What inspires you most about Spencer West's journey?
- ▶ What lessons do you take away from his story about overcoming obstacles?
- ▶ What does persistence and grit mean to you?



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## “No Can’t, No Won’t, Only How”: Navigating Obstacles and Overcoming Conflicts

(1 OF 1)

Everyone faces obstacles, but how they deal with those obstacles is what sets them apart. NBA legend Michael Jordan once said, “Obstacles don’t have to stop you. If you run into a wall, don’t turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it.”

Motivational speaker Spencer West, whose legs were removed at the age of five because of a genetic disease he was born with, “redefined possible” by climbing Mount Kilimanjaro on his hands and in a wheelchair. His goal was to raise awareness for the millions of drought-affected people who lack access to clean water and to raise funds for clean water projects for communities in Kenya. In his powerful message, he shares that “We have the capacity to redefine the limits of our own potential. There is no can’t or won’t, only how.”

### Record and Reflect:

Ask students to consider and address the following questions in a journal reflection:

- ▶ What are the personal obstacles that keep you from achieving or even setting goals? How can you overcome these obstacles?
- ▶ Who encourages you to keep working toward your goals? How?
- ▶ Who inspires you to look beyond your own fears and worries to the wider world? How?
- ▶ How will you use this inspiration to face obstacles head on?
- ▶ How can you help your team members overcome the obstacles you face individually and as a group?
- ▶ As a team, now think about West’s words, “No can’t, no won’t, only how.” Write down all the “we can’t” statements you’ve found yourselves saying and discuss:
- ▶ What are the obstacles standing in the way of achieving the goals we have set for our action projects?
- ▶ What are the obstacles we can catalogue and how can we overcome them?