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Andrea Bocelli: Breaking the barriers of victim mentality

By [Rainer Zitelmann](#)

Today, many people have a victim mentality — they see themselves as victims of society, disadvantage, or discrimination of adverse circumstances. But the disabled people in my book *Unbreakable Spirit* never saw themselves as victims. They seek pity. They saw themselves as creators of their own destinies and believed that they could achieve things that even without disabilities would never achieve.

In his autobiography, the [blind Italian singer Andrea Bocelli](#) writes that he hated being treated differently from sighted people and felt himself capable of doing everything that other boys his own age did and insisted on being judged by the same standards as everyone else. Remarks like “Be careful there,” “That’s too dangerous for you,” and “Wait for me to help you” made him angry and brought tears to his eyes. In the face of such concern, he would throw himself into whatever it was that others considered especially dangerous just to show them. He wanted to prove that a blind man could achieve anything if he really wanted to. A phrase in his autobiography is that he was convinced he had to be “the best simply in order to be considered equal.”

Andrea Bocelli is not only one of the most successful Italian singers of all time. He is also one of the few who have been able to establish themselves on a global stage in both pop and classical music. He has performed in front of presidents of the USA and several popes, filled concert halls around the world, sung duets with the most famous singers of his time, and broke records after another.

His first album, “[Il Mare Calmo della Sera](#),” reached the upper echelons of the charts after its release and received multiple platinum awards just a few weeks later. His album “Romanza,” released in 1997, sold over twelve million copies. His career has climbed high in the charts, achieved multiple platinum sales, and won major music awards such as the World Music Awards, Classic Brit Awards, a Bambi in the field of classical music, and a Billboard Award. Bocelli was also nominated for Grammys several times.

Bocelli was born on September 22, 1958 in Lajatico, a small town in northwestern Tuscany. His parents noticed shortly after Andrea’s birth that something was wrong: his eyes were often inflamed and red. As their son continued to suffer, they consulted a specialist in Turin. His diagnosis: Andrea was suffering from glaucoma, and the condition would gradually make him completely blind. Andrea underwent a total of 27 operations as a child, the first of which took place when he was only six months old.

At the age of 12, he suffered a momentous accident: he was attending a boarding school for the blind at the time, and, during a soccer game, a ball struck him in the right eye — the eye with which he could at least still perceive color and light. Shortly afterward, he became completely blind.

What is it that drives this megastar? It’s a productive dissatisfaction that he shares with many successful people, who are characterized by a specific combination of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Past successes give them a core confidence that can also be called satisfaction. At the same time, they are always dissatisfied with what they have achieved. They live by the motto that there is nothing good enough that it cannot be improved. “Everything in this world,” Bocelli said, “is hard; every task and objective that we achieve is hard. Where there is competition, there is work. This doesn’t frighten me; the main point is to improve day by day.”

The key to his success has always been his immense self-confidence, combined with the modesty of a student, who is always striving to recognize his weaknesses and learn new things — no matter how much success he has already achieved. “I am always critical of myself. In the world of classical music in particular, it’s extremely difficult ever to be fully satisfied with yourself.” Soprano [Ana Maria Martinez](#), who has sung extensively with Bocelli on his concert tours, said of him: “He’s always hard. On the tours he worked every day on his voice. He’s always doing exercises. Sometimes we even vocalized together. I’m always curious to see what someone else is doing vocally and technique-wise. ... One day he told a group of us, ‘I had already become known doing my recordings, but what really interests me is every day to learn more, to polish my craft, to do things that have artistic value and integrity.’”

What do you think you would achieve if you could tap into the same astonishing strength that enabled Bocelli to become one of the most successful singers in Europe?

Rainer Zitelmann is the author of the book [Unbreakable Spirit: Rising above All Odds](#).