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ENG 101 – Spedaliere

Assignment 1 – A Lesson Learned

What happens when a responsibility is thrust upon you without notification, and you don’t even realize it? Some people rise to the occasion, some people remain oblivious. In one particular scenario, I fell into the latter category. It was my senior year of high school, and I was oblivious that my peers were looking to me for guidance. While I was no stranger to leadership, I would come to learn that I was expected to step up to the plate even when I resisted the idea.

Leadership was not a new concept for me. Growing up, I was surrounded by well-respected leaders. My grandfather owned a bakery with dozens of employees, and I have never heard anything but respect for him. My uncles took over and emulated him, and I watched what they did to earn that respect. Alongside that experience, I earned a reputation of my own in high school as an intelligent, well-liked person. Most people recognized me by the lab coat that was passed down to me, as part of an annual tradition. I was captain of the Math League team and a leader among the Mock Trial students. When a team was forming for the Odyssey of the Mind program, I jumped in again. It was a program I had success in previously, and with a team of mostly newcomers, my experience would seemingly prove useful.

However, I never stepped up to the plate. Decisions were done by committee, and I mostly just went along with what the group wanted. That was only fair, right? I took my part in the game and worked hard to fit into the ideas we had. I contributed to team meetings, and helped others who needed it. However, as competition time drew near, we were falling behind and struggling. There was clear chaos and some dissention among the ranks. Clear leadership was needed to provide organization and a direction forward. I failed to recognize that, and the team was suffering for it. There were some major disagreements between members of the team, of which I was involved in at least one. I was pulled aside by the teacher that was in charge, asking why I was not solving these problems. To me, it came out of nowhere that I was expected to be in charge. A team meeting led to asking someone else to right the ship, and she took to it willingly.

The result was mostly disappointment in myself. I had failed my team, and disappointed those that expected more of me, especially myself. I just focused on my work, and under the new guidance our team earned a second-place finish and a trip to the state finals. Why was I resistant in the first place? On top of being busy, I had assumed it was intended to be a design by committee project. There was never any official discussion of someone leading the team or organizing how and when work was to be done. It never really occurred, and I was busy enough elsewhere that I was not eager to take on the extra responsibility.

This situation left me with the idea that I needed to be more cognizant of the people around me and to always offer 100% of my effort and ability. It was detrimental to my teammates and soured some personal relationships that were previously amicable. It can be difficult to look within and recognize failure, but I believe the results made me a better person. Failure builds characters, as they say.