



hadn't won first place in the competition, we would still be impressed. Jason's story could have looked like "1st place in LBW business competition" and "works well on a team" in a resume; but the tone of the essay helped the award/trait come alive and stick vividly in the reader's mind.

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"Beyond Dictionary Definitions of Leadership"

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"All I know about leadership I learned from . . ." What items could a person use to describe leadership qualities?

Inspired by the student council advisors at my high school.

STUDENT COUNCIL WAS A BIG PART of my life in high school. I have participated in it since my first year of high school. When I first joined, I was quiet, naïve, and unwilling to participate in many activities. I was scared to meet new people and afraid to apply myself. This all began to change. Half way through my first year in student council, one of the advisors came up to me and asked why I did not participate that much. I did not have an answer for her and did not know how to respond. After this, I began to think of an answer. I became frustrated and decided to change. I started to show up at events and had a great time. I realized I loved this and wanted to start leading these activities. In my sophomore, junior, and now my senior year of high school, I asserted myself and took on a strong leadership role in student council. I did not figure out the answer to why I was so reserved until this year with the help of this question.

When I looked up leadership in the dictionary, it said that it was the capacity to lead and the act or instance of leading. These are two very broad definitions of leadership. Many people have different notions of what this word actually means. When I was challenged to use different items to describe what leadership actually is, I thought this was going to be a hard and obnoxious task. What could I learn from comparing leadership to a stuffed animal or a rubber chicken? But when I sat



down to come up with a couple of answers, I realized that leadership could be compared to almost anything a person wants.

All I know about leadership I learned from a calculator. A calculator can add everything together to come up with the best answer. It can delete what is unnecessary and only include what is important. It can solve any type of problem. These are all important equalities a leader has to have. A leader has to be able to add all of the ideas together to make the best possible plan. Leaders have to know how to decipher the good and the bad out of an idea. They have to be versatile and know how to deal with different types of issues.

All I know about leadership I learned from a ball. A ball is able to bounce back up after it is dropped. It is round and has no creases. A ball can be thrown back and forth to different people. All of these qualities are also leadership qualities. A leader has to be ready for every situation that is thrown at him or her. He or she has to be able to bounce back from any setbacks and never dwell on the past. Leaders have to exhibit many qualities and never be closed-minded about a situation. A leader must be able to delegate when he or she cannot get the work done. They have to trust everyone they lead to be able to “catch the ball” and keep a project rolling.

This activity made me realize that being a leader is so much more than just having authority and having the ability to take control of a situation. A leader has to be trusting of all the people he or she leads and, leaders must be able to combine ideas into one encompassing idea. They cannot sit in the background and watch events happen; they have to jump in and be involved. They should not delegate all their responsibilities away.

Leadership is more than what the dictionary says it is.

I learned through all of this that I have many of these qualities. I have the ability to solve problems, lead through adversity, and be versatile. From answering this question, I realized that I could lead effectively, even if my leadership style is different from other individuals. When I joined student council in my first year of high school, I did not have these qualities because I was never put into a situation where I had to lead. I was too reserved to try. When I tried, I learned that I could succeed in this. I did not realize until I answered this question about leadership. I was never able to see that being a leader is not just about taking control of a group and telling everyone what to do. When



I was a freshman, I thought leadership was this. I did not know that I did not have to be forceful and strict. I stereotyped a leader then. This is where I went wrong. A leader is about being yourself and never letting anyone change you. I thought I had to change to be a good leader. Only when I expanded my comfort zone did I realize this was not true. It only took three years and a silly question/game to figure this out.

ANALYSIS

Vicky's essay combines both playful metaphors and an honest appraisal of her experiences in Student Council to demonstrate the evolution of her thinking about leadership. Vicky begins by revealing some of her weaknesses in Student Council: "I was quiet, naïve, and unwilling to participate in many activities. I was scared to meet new people and afraid to apply myself." Vicky takes a similar tactic to Angelica in "No Longer Invisible" (Chapter 7) by presenting an image of herself before her transformative decision to take on "a strong leadership role in student council." This first paragraph could be strengthened by a more detailed description of what Student Council is and what students' roles are. It's best not to assume that admissions officers will know about the groups and activities you reference in your essay, so contextualizing clues are always helpful. Vicky could have explained how many people were members of student council.

The most memorable part of Vicky's essay is her act of looking up leadership in the dictionary and not feeling satisfied with the definition she found: "the capacity to lead and the act or instance of leading." This unclear definition, combined with a challenging question/game to compare leadership to things like stuffed animals and rubber chickens, compelled Vicky to discover that "leadership could be compared to almost anything a person wants." Another contextualizing clue that could provide more clarity for this essay is to know the origin of this game. Who assigned Vicky this "hard and obnoxious task"? One of the key strengths in Vicky's essay is her honesty about her thoughts and emotions. You may be tempted to romanticize the truth in an admissions essay, but writing honestly is not only ethical, it also allows your authentic voice to shine through.

The third and four paragraphs provide creative comparisons between leadership and two unexpected objects: a calculator and a ball. Vicky writes clearly how attributes of calculators and balls are also qualities of effective leaders. Vicky does a good job of summarizing the lessons she learned from this comparative exercise: "This activity made me realize that being a leader is so much more than just having authority and having the ability to take control of a situation . . . Leadership is more than what the dictionary says it is." In the final