Jeddi

Common App Personal Essay

1. Prompt: Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

Another day of refining my battle-hardened squad under the searing sun.

“Give me another twenty!”

15 legs launched into the air to execute roundhouse kicks with impeccable form. *Good, good.* I was satisfied with this.

After training in Taekwondo for over 10 years, I finally earned my black belt in 2019. Shortly after, my master offered me the opportunity to assist him in teaching one of his classes, which I took in a heartbeat. I promised my master that we would win the next tournament.

Taekwondo instructors are different from drill instructors in times of war. We play the role of squad leaders, leading the team into competitions and be directly responsible for the results of any match. Right now, I was feeling pretty good about my squad. Until I walked to the end of the line and reached Eva, the time bomb of our team.

Seeing Eva, my blood pressure spiked for a second. Her roundhouse kicks looked as awkward as her posture, and even more awkward than that were the looks from the other senior instructors. I wouldn’t let her spar if we competed. Not because I hated losing, but because I didn’t want her to get hurt. Yes, if this was a war movie, Eva would be one of the soldiers who died on their first step after landing on the beach.

I always saw Eva as the weakest link in our team whom I needed to give extra care for. That was, until the day belt promotion test results were announced, in which Eva finally got her yellow belt. After the ceremony, I found her crying tears of joy outside the park with her parents.

I wondered why I didn’t feel as overjoyed as she did. *Wasn’t it too early to celebrate? We haven’t won anything yet. Or was I focusing on the wrong thing?*

All this time I only cared if my team was strong enough. I was so concerned on ensuring my team as a collective to win matches that I neglected the growth of its individuals. In retrospect, Eva had actually been improving, I just wasn't able to see it. I only saw her flaws. While still far from perfect, she now threw her roundhouse kick with a snap that was essential to a good kick. I realized I took her determination for granted. She hadn’t been a bad student; It was me who had been a horrible teacher. I was ashamed of my pessimism towards Eva. I then told her and her parents that from then on, I would commit myself to Eva just like she had towards Taekwondo.

Ever since, I learned to be more observant towards Eva and the other individuals in my classes. I started recording each of their moves and giving personal feedback on their practices. I separated the class based on what was best for each student to strengthen their weaknesses, rather than what our team needed to win. I also decreased the amount of general instructions I gave the class, in favour of providing my students with one-on-one training sessions. Now, I take more pride and joy in the changing colour of their belts than in the trophies under our club's name.

I’ve carried this experience to my other teaching activities like Business Hour – a club where young enthusiastic people can learn about the business world. By learning to be perceptive towards all my students, I was able to create the finest learning environment possible to bring out everyone's best.

I now believe that the quality of a teacher is not measured by the performance of the average student under them, but of the weakest individual under their tutelage. After all, a good squad leader cares more about the safety of his team members than the number of enemies they are able to defeat. Like them, I intend to leave no man behind.