Topic C:

There may be personal information that you want considered as part of your admissions application. Write an essay describing that information. You might include exceptional hardships, challenges or opportunities that have shaped or impacted your abilities or academic credentials, personal responsibilities, exceptional achievements or talents, educational goals or ways in which you might contribute to an institution committed to creating a diverse learning environment. (Word limit: 600-750)

Word Count: 720

My heart pulsated wildly. My hands turned cold and clammy. “What if I fail to make this event successful?”

Deep down, I felt anxious about leading a highly anticipated annual charity event by one of the oldest and biggest NGOs in the world. I was appointed as the head organizer of the Leo Victory Allegiance with 31 youth volunteers and 10 lifelong club leaders under my helm. Despite having personally served in the club for three years, all that my mind could weigh in was the seemingly high expectations involved – especially that last year’s charity secured a position on national television.

As I took up the baton, I called a kick-off meeting four months prior to the event’s date and pitched to my delegates about my plan to rejuvenate the grand event by adding fresh “spices” to last year’s event. With a set theme of “Feed the Hungry”, I proposed to expand our target audience to younger kids below 10 years old to raise awareness about hunger and poverty. To form a stronger bond between volunteers, I intended to organize dish-plating competitions, mini basketball games and relay runs, emphasizing the importance of teamwork in tackling challenges early on.

However, just before I could complete my sentence, the head of finance, who was also a veteran in the club, immediately stepped in and blatantly disagreed with the idea of having sports games since we would run out of budget. “But we can buy cheaper balls, right?” one of the younger members’ fast reflex sounded through the room.

The meeting slowly turned into chaos as, one by one, everyone started blindly defending their own positions. The creative, out-of-the-box ideas from the youth members were opposed by the club leaders, and the proven approach from the veterans was ambitiously rejected by the younger generations. Noticing the argument was not going anywhere, and while trying not to lose the grip of the situation, I stood up and called for a break. I thought long and hard. Sweat started running through my forehead. I could feel the heat on my forehead and palms.

Should I side with the veterans and take the safe path? Or should I promote the youth’s ideas and take a bold risk? I felt sandwiched between two generations. I could not make up my mind as there was no right or wrong answer. Thus, I decided to understand both parties.

During the break, I approached the volunteers and asked them about their vision for the event. They sounded their arguments as to why a sports-oriented charity program is a winning recipe for the new target audience. Next, I approached the head of finance and operations who went through convincing historical figures. “Eureka,” I figured, “no wonder they were screaming at each other.” Their stakeholder concerns were not aligned in the first place! I should have sorted this out from the beginning rather than jumping straight into ideation and brainstorming.

Having heard both sides of the story, I gathered my courage to apologize to everyone for the undirected imbalance. As I communicated the seniors’ concerns about the budget and execution risk of the event, I let the youth volunteers’ dreams of making a bigger impact be known to the group. Keeping my composure, I motivated everyone that we could deliver an impactful event while keeping our risk in check. From then on, our discussions took off. Arguments were focused on finding solutions rather than knocking each other down.

I always thought of leadership as an autocracy. After this experience, though, I learned that “leading” takes on many forms – including listening to and integrating everyone’s ideas given their different backgrounds, a celebration of diversity in thought. Leadership is not about the pride of a title, nor is it about the power of commanding people. Leadership is empowering others to succeed. The success of one member means that the whole team succeeds, and the job of a leader is to shepherd this process.

Just two days before the event, one of our volunteers forgot to purchase goodie bags to pack the snacks. I immediately felt the tension in the room before I promptly evoked, “what can we do with the snacks?” One youth volunteer started stacking the snacks, forming a tall “Pisa Tower” of food. As I witnessed the veterans chuckling and helping out their junior counterpart whom they shrugged off at first, I confidently cast away all my anxiety, knowing that I have set the oven temperature right to cook a perfect charity event.

*Hi Michael,*

*What a chic way to respond to this prompt!*

*I think the whole narrative of this piece is on point, aside from the last paragraph which felt like an abrupt ending to me. I get that the vibe is more of a “post-credits scene” of the “movie.” However, you don’t want to miss out communicating the end result of the project to the readers as well.*

*At any rate, well done!*

* *Matthew*