Essay Editor : Calysta

Mentee : Rachintas Marpaung

Intended Major : Engineering

Intended University : University of Pennsylvania

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

“Aw that’s cute”, was a phrase I heard often while holding my 16-inch soprano saxophone behind the stage curtains. Surrounded by 36-inch trombones and 24-inch euphoniums, I walked onto the stage from the left wing, separated from all the other woodwinds on the right wing. My seat - front left - had been prepared right in the middle of the trumpets. My sheet music matched theirs; it had trumpet 1 written in the upper left hand corner, complete with the absence of the saxophone’s glissandos that the trumpets aren’t usually accustomed to. In front of us, Mr. Anthony waved his pencil up, gesturing the start of our first piece: ‘Puttin on the Ritz’. I raised my baby saxophone up together with the trumpets, and with the first staccato G note, the smooth, warm timbre of my saxophone drowned in the bright, tight timbre of the trumpets.

Isolated from my woodwind family, the trumpets overpowered my baby saxophone during my first year at my school’s swing band. However, half a dozen performances later, I was asked to play the tenor saxophone - the first and only one in the band. To me, no was the obvious answer. The way I saw it, the tenor was to be played by ‘big old men’ with large enough lungs able to blow sufficient air to resonate through the 6-inch diameter bell. As a 5’1 girl with a hand span of 7 inches, I could have fallen over even just attempting to pick up the instrument. But I was up for the challenge; to have my own part and I’d be reunited with the woodwinds.

How different could it be? Same instrument, same fingering, same music… With my first blow, however, it was clear that the larger mouthpiece meant that my embouchure was too firm, leading to frequent ear-piercing squeaks at the press of the octave key. Each bell key was almost 2 inches apart, so my small pinkie couldn’t reach the bottom C key. I felt like a beginner again, yet I was adamant to make my voice heard. My daily practice of the C major scale soon progressed to the notorious C# major scale, while my crochet tonguing developed into semiquavers.

3 months later, my seat stands on the right side of the stage where I can present my glissandos. Tenor 1 replaces the trumpet 1 that once sat blatantly on top of my sheet music. Above all, I can now embrace the rich, round sound of my saxophone. While I had found my musical voice by coincidence, I learned to make my voice heard, and I aim to continue raising my voice in other aspects of my life. I leave reviews at every other restaurant I eat at to express my opinions on their food, location, ambiance. I advocate for social issues I agree with by sharing them on social media. Most importantly, knowing that engineering is a stereotypically male-dominated world, I try to project my voice onto issues I care about that can be solved by technology, leading me to create Project Tech Talk (PTT).

As an online platform aimed to share technological ideas, I used to see PTT as a way to share the things I care about. However, I now see PTT as a way to give others a platform to find their own voice in the engineering field. The frequent “really? I didn’t expect you to be into that kind of stuff” when speaking about the potential of living without transistors, or the possibility of using the smart grid to increase grid efficiency has driven me to provide others with a place to discuss these advancements with like-minded people. Ultimately, I want others in the field to be able to find their tenor saxophone, using PTT as their stage.

My drive to pursue the field of engineering is undoubted, and with that I bring my drive to project not only my personal voice but others’ voices too.

Hey Rachintas,

I love the personal touch of this essay. Through this essay, you seem to bridge your experience in changing instruments to a much more complex one and the inception of your online platform: Project Tech Talk. These are both great and deeply unique things about you which makes a great topic for an essay, but the essay’s focus seems to be a little bit discordant. Though you explained your transition from a smaller instrument to a harder one in great depth, as a reader, the underlying message I got from it was that you are persistent and you are not willing to give up even though it seems challenging. The second part of your essay, which centres on Project Tech Talk, is more geared towards enabling or giving a voice to the unheard. I must admit that integrating two aspects of your life through one underlying message is quite challenging, but you’re actually almost there in achieving it.

Moreover, I believe that this essay could tell me so much more about Project Tech Talk. Since this organization is completely handmade by you, I’d love to know more about what you did to create PTT and what challenges you overcame to really achieve success in PTT. This can directly link to your personal success in mastering the tenor saxophone, which can show your persistence in making your voice heard. If you struggle to find room for more words, remember that it’s always best to cut down details that are not very necessary to describe what truly matters to you.

All in all, I believe that this essay is almost there in achieving a concrete lesson from start to finish, but it's really up to you to decide what moral it should be:

* Amplifying your voice, or
* Persistence

As of right now, this essay is a mix of these two morals, which means that the focus of the essay may seem discordant to readers like myself. However, successfully writing two morals in one essay is difficult, but if you can make a seamless flow and connection between the two, that would be awesome as well.

I’m looking forward to seeing the development of this essay. I really love how its going so far and I can’t wait to see how you develop this essay into something so much more.

Sincerely,

Calysta

Essay Editor at ALL-in Eduspace