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 failed to make this event successful?” I wondered.

Deep down, I felt anxious about leading such 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 for the first time with 31 youth volunteers and 10 lifelong club leaders under my helm. After personally serving in the club for three years, I understood the high expectations involved, but I could not help to doubt myself especially with the uphill task to match last year’s amazing accomplishment with the annual event being streamed 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 some “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 earlier. To form a stronger bond between the volunteers, I intended to organize dish-plating competitions, mini basketball games and relay runs, emphasizing the importance of teamwork in tackling challenges.

However, just before completing my sentence, the head of finance, who was also a veteran in the club, immediately stepped in and disagreed with the idea of having sports games since we will be running out of budget. “But we can buy cheaper balls, right?” One of the members bashed in rudely.

The meeting slowly turned into chaos as, one by one, everyone started disagreeing with each other. 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 outright 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 their vision of the event. Turns out, they were envisioning a memorable sports-charity program, none like the ordinary charity programs. Next, I approached the head of finance and operations and learned that they wanted to ensure the event went successful by focusing on just donating without adding such activities. It was a eureka moment for me. No wonder they were screaming at each other. Their vision and concerns were not aligned in the first place! I should have sorted this from the beginning rather than jumping straight into the ideation and brainstorming process.

Understanding the situation better, I gathered my courage to apologize to everyone. It was my fault that this misunderstanding happened. Continuing the meeting, I communicated the seniors’ concerns about the budget and the execution risk of the event. At the same time, I let the youth volunteers share their dreams of making a bigger impact every year. 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. But after this experience, I learned that leadership is not all about my opinions. Rather, it is about listening to and integrating everyone’s ideas despite their different backgrounds, then determining the solution together. 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 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. Everyone panicked, but, this time, I didn’t. “What can we do with the snacks?” I smirked. One youth volunteer started stacking the snacks, forming a tall “Pisa Tower” of food, and the veterans chuckled and happily helped.