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**IST Short Essay**

I have had multiple leadership experiences in the past that have shaped me as an individual. These range from being a captain of my High School golf team to hosting poker nights at my house. The one experience that influenced my leadership skills the most was cofounding the company MeetingSprout my freshman year at Syracuse. The experience grew my personal and professional skills and reinforced my passion for Information Technology.

MeetingSprout’s purpose was to solve many problems in the scheduling market prevalent today. The first was surrounding the lack of information from those around you when you schedule your day. To schedule a meeting, you have to send out multiple emails to find the times everyone in your group is free, and then wait for a response from everyone. Every member’s available times have to be written down and cross-referenced with each other to find that optimal time that the group is available. Then you your self has to propose a time, wait for responses, and send a confirmation email with event details. If a member doesn’t prefer that time, or has something come up, you have to restart the process, commonly referred to as email ping-pong.

Scheduling an event not only relies on the members’ schedules that you are scheduling with, but also the schedules in your personal life. Our service also is a repository for schedules around you, such as local store hours and organization events. An example would be searching the I-School calendar to see upcoming events, and merge them with your calendar to see when you are available to meet with your group.

Our service solves the problems above by combining every calendar you need in one place, and providing them across a consistent interface. You can merge your calendar with other members to see when they are available, and schedule meetings, events, or schedule an appointment with a doctor while being able to reference your own schedule. Other’s calendars appear on yours in the form of a shadow, keeping the interface clean and consistent, while maintaining privacy. This connects individuals, groups, and businesses in a new way never introduced before. Every time a user visits a businesses calendar, our service keeps a record of the times that a user is available in the form of a counter. The business can see a report of this data that shows which times most of it’s direct customers are available, allowing them to schedule store hours, staff appropriately, and display coupons to drive low times.

I first got involved in this project by collaborating with two other colleagues on the problems of scheduling a carpool, and we soon realized that this problem of lack of scheduling knowledge spanned multiple real world scenarios. We then brainstormed many ways to solve this, and found the calendaring market had some major faults that, if solved in the right way, could be disruptive. Through talking to multiple students, teachers, and staff members, we iterated into an idea we thought could potentially be a startup and earn profit.

We soon founded the company through the Sandbox, and competed in the RvD competition where we were the first freshman team to receive funding and office space in the Tech Garden. I took on the role as CTO, and was responsible for developing the software, the interface design, and pitching the products to potential customers and investors. I had previous experience in coding, and transferred that knowledge to web development, earning me the CTO role. I also had a strong background in interface design using Photoshop, and therefore was responsible for that aspect of the project as well. I also gave the pitches because I had previous experience with giving speeches and making professional grade PowerPoint’s in High School. My pitch and interface design eventually won us funding in the RvD competition. This helped the project as a whole because it took a lot of weight off of the other two founders shoulders, allowing them to solely focus on their respective responsibilities. I contributed skills that complemented the others in the team, and when combined, produced the final product.

The project eventually took on three additional interns that we hoped to convert to paid employees once we gained traction, but slowed down when we made the decision to focus on school and build a bigger base credit and GPA wise before considering pursing this full time. The project is currently halted, and the cofounders decided to part ways after multiple fundamental disagreements in business decisions.

I learned a lot from the process of going from ideation to startup on both a personal and professional level. I learned how to be a better leader from observing how my teammates reacted to certain authoritative decisions I made. At the startups prime, I managed two developers, and figured out the best possible way to plan and execute a vision. I employed lean project implementation, and fine-tuned the methodology for my own needs. Every great leader needs to be able to ignite fire and passion in their team, and I learned how to do this by giving 110% every day and showing my teammates how passionate I was, therefore leading by example. The culture I set had a positive impact on everyone else around me, as the others would work that extra hour to make whatever they were doing that much better. I also learned to make a decision quickly with confidence.

I also added the ability to effectively convert technological vocabulary into something everyone can understand. This made me a better teammate when conversing with the business-minded founders, and lead to increasing my overall communication skills. This can directly apply to the real world, as employees need to have the ability of talking to teammates and managers in a language everyone relates to.

My ability to be a good teammate was enhanced by this project, because, for the first time, I had been handed a specialized delegation that contributed to the entire piece of a project. I learned how to schedule my own time to work on my delegations, and effectively meet a deadline. I also learned how to interact with other types of people, and tolerate different coworkers habits and personalities. This made me a much more likable teammate, which improves overall team production.

I grew my professional skills, and I found what focus within Information Technology that I really enjoyed the most. I had pushed myself to learn web development, and am still learning the craft today. My skills have grown from basic HTLM and CSS to Javascript, JQuery and Ruby on Rails. My design experience as I learned Photoshop and Flash to provide the images and videos used by the code. My presentational and speaking skills also grew through me making the PowerPoint’s, and giving them in front of judges and large audiences.

The most valuable thing I took from the project seeing how I could combine my three areas of focus to provide something valuable to the work force. The next generations’ leaders are those that contain a technological, business, and design background with the ability to communicate effectively in between the three languages. Technology companies are becoming more global and are broadening the scope of their skills through the workers they employ, therefore requiring a leader that has experience in multiple areas, the three critical areas being technology, business, and design. By having knowledge in these areas, it also allows the leader to design project plans with understanding the time it takes to do each part, therefore producing a more accurate estimation of total project time. Leaders can also see how to execute a project with fewer resources, and devise a leaner project plan for their team.

Overall, MeetingSprout was an experience that I will never forget, and will apply what I learned from it for the rest of my life. I became a better person, leader, and teammate because of it, and found what exactly in the technology field I want to focus on. I had to go outside my boundaries to do something I never thought I could do, and it cemented my beliefs for my ability as a leader. It was by far the most challenging leadership position I had ever taken, and can take what I learned to bring positive change in the professional world.