

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

I hopped in the backseat of the car, ready to tear into the box of cookies my mom just bought from the grocery store. As I ripped off the plastic packaging, I heard a knock on the window. I looked and saw a boy begging for food. I gave him the box of cookies and suddenly noticed there were other children begging beside him. As we drove through the impoverished streets of New Delhi, eight-year-old me felt disheartened. Didn't they have school? Why is there dirt in their water bottles? Why is that baby alone? I felt strongly that something needed to be done.

A few years later, I learned of The Akshaya Patra Foundation: an organization that aims to tackle poverty in India. I eagerly joined my local Bay Area Youth Chapter. Four years later, I became the president of my chapter and started the Akshaya Patra Club at my school. I wanted to spread awareness to more communities. I pulled together a diverse group of students to hold a performing arts show fundraiser that would introduce the cause to the broader Bay Area community.

I started taking on numerous tasks without delegating to the rest of the club because I deemed myself ultimately responsible for the event. I thought that if things were done my way, the outcome would be successful. I was finding performers, working through the logistics, creating a website to sell tickets, and marketing to bring in an audience. Though I felt alone, I actually had tremendous support from the club, but I wasn't using it.

The day of the show was approaching, my to-do list was still growing, and my phone was flooding with messages. Overwhelmed, I finally confided in the club vice president and we attempted to assign work throughout the club. However, the majority of it came back to the both of us since our club members weren't used to getting assignments. This helped me understand the importance of delegation as a leader, as without the other members' help we struggled to keep the show together. The event raised nearly \$3000, but fell short of our original goal by \$2,000.

At the club board's celebratory dinner, I expressed that I felt like a lousy leader because I held back our group from producing our best work. I confided that I felt

overwhelmed with tasks and could have shared them with the team better, and I needed their help to fix this. We decided to redesign the club to be more collaborative and to let others lead their own events. Not only did this take some pressure off of me, but it also re-kindled my team's passion for their work.

The following year, a few club members led a coin drive, which raised about \$800 and spread awareness to our entire school. The redesign of the club was crucial during Covid-19 when it was much more difficult to coordinate an event. During a brainstorming session to rethink our show, a member had an idea to hold a virtual one. Our collective effort helped quintuple our proceeds (\$15,000!) from the year before, and I felt satisfied with our outcome.

I learned that being a good leader doesn't mean taking over and doing everything yourself, but instead delegating efficiently, communicating effectively, and sharing control. The show transformed my mindset about leadership and my struggles turned to growth. I anticipate further developing my leadership skills in order to maximize what I can do for the organization.