

The HBS Essay - A Successful Example

My upbringing taught me to be proudly self-reliant. My mother, a construction worker by day and a waitress by night, worked relentlessly to afford to keep us in a strong Massachusetts school system. And her busy work schedule forced me to take on a high level of responsibility from a young age. By the time I was 10, I knew how to make dinner for myself and my younger sister. If I wanted to get ice cream with my friends, I earned money by babysitting for my neighbors. I had to spend extra time on my homework as I often did not have a second set of eyes checking for mistakes. Though the self-reliance I built was something I was proud of, the challenge was that these experiences also made me naively believe that I could tackle any obstacle by myself, and that I did not need help from others to achieve my goals.

However, my perspective changed when I was diagnosed with type I diabetes at the age of 13. I was initially unaffected by my diagnosis and insisted on doing my own insulin shots at the hospital as soon as the nurses would let me. Due to some unfortunate timing, I was forced to spend my third and final night at the hospital alone. During that quiet night my new reality finally sank in, and I started to question my ability to handle this challenge alone. Luckily, when I left the hospital I was assigned a fantastic team of nutritionists, nurses, and doctors who taught me how to manage my condition. But gradually, my appointments with this team became less frequent. As the only diabetic in my family, I felt isolated as I struggled with the daily ups and downs of diabetes. After years of staunch independence, I felt myself suddenly wanting a broader community for support.

I found this community initially on the softball field. I had been playing softball since the age of eight but the game took on new meaning after my diagnosis. Putting on my uniform and stepping onto the field, I bonded with a group of individuals focused on one goal: winning. Out of this mindset grew unconditional friendships and when low blood sugar forced me out of a game, every player would check on me and cheer loudly when I when went back on the field. In return, I put everything I had into our games; I even sport a permanent scar on my left leg from constantly sliding into bases. During my 2008 season on my college varsity softball team, Coach Tom asked us to write down our unique strengths. The day before playoffs, each player received a ball with a written quote encapsulating this self-evaluation. I now keep this softball on my desk at work to remind myself of my individualized mantra: "I may not be the biggest or the strongest, but I always give 100% of myself to the team".

As a varsity softball player in college, my team devotion was tested when an over-zealous slide into third base sidelined me for most of the season. I was initially devastated by this accident: for years I had gauged my contribution to the team by my statistical performance, and I felt insignificant without this data. Fortunately, I discovered a renewed sense of purpose mentoring one of our struggling freshmen, Rachel....

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...I empathized with Rachel's frustrations and feelings of isolation, recalling my own emotions from that third night in the hospital. Together we worked tirelessly to improve her fielding skills and I felt immensely proud when Rachel fielded several games successfully later that season. This experience taught me that the impact I could have as a leader on a team was as important as the impact I could have at bat or in the outfield. I've carried this lesson with me to my Boston co-ed league where I currently add value to my team of talented but relatively inexperienced softball players every week by strategizing field positioning, directing base runners, and rallying morale. Each community I become a part of—be it the leading bank where I now work, my coed softball team, or my volunteer leadership committee—receives the same level of collaborative enthusiasm from me. My experiences on the softball field have taught me the value of teamwork and leadership, which have become core to my personality and vital to my professional success. By knowing how to work with and motivate large groups, I have been able to lead cross-sector research projects at a leading bank, revealing unique investment insights. During these projects I have taken responsibility for ensuring that a team objective is established and that everyone contributes, leading to great successes and promotions not only for me but also for my teammates. And going forward, I believe that these qualities will enable me to become an effective and influential executive at a company focused on improving the quality of care and the quality of life for all individuals like me living with diabetes and seeking their own "teams" for support."