



As a young adult, you face many changes. How has being a JROTC Cadet helped you handle and navigate change?

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In May, 2021 I finished my sophomore year of high school in North Dakota. I had many friends that I was excited to spend the summer with, and I was looking forward to my junior year at my high school. I liked my school, had a great relationship with my teachers and other school staff, participated in school sponsored sports and was enjoying life. Not long after summer break started, my mom talked with me about the possibility of moving out of state due to a job opportunity for my stepdad. This was completely unexpected for me and I quickly realized that I didn't like this potential change in my life. I was, quite frankly, shocked when the move to Arizona was finalized. My hopes of graduating with my friends that I had met over the past decade were shattered. By the end of July, my mom, stepdad, two dogs and I were living in Arizona, and I quickly had to enroll at a high school in anticipation of the early August start date. I came to the conclusion that whether I liked it or not, life goes on, but change was hard.

When I arrived in Arizona, I searched for something to be a part of and found the JROTC program. Unfortunately, the first high school I attended did not have a JROTC program even though their school website stated that they did. I was disappointed in this and talked with my mom about finding a school that offered JROTC. I decided to take a tour of Skyline High School and see what I thought of the school. During that initial tour, I was able to meet Colonel Stevens, the senior army instructor for JROTC as well as Sergeant Simmons. They both made me feel welcome and answered all the questions my mom and I had. Luckily

for me, not only was Skyline High School close to the house we had just moved to, but it also had everything I needed, including JROTC and a large selection of classes including AP and dual credit. I, once again, found myself facing change and transferred to Skyline after the Fall quarter break. When I thought about it, this change, while somewhat scary, seemed to be easier than the previous one I had gone through. I started understanding the factors that can influence somebody's attitude towards change, including my own.

When I first started the JROTC program, I was not very confident in my leadership abilities nor was I comfortable navigating change. My first year, I learned the ropes of the program. Coming in during my junior year meant that I had some catching up to do, and I needed to learn things quickly. I learned how to be a good follower, looking to my instructors and superiors for guidance and advice. I also learned customs and courtesies, winning colors, and the value of teamwork. Towards the end of my first year, particularly after participating in JCLC, I began to notice that my confidence was increasing and the prospect of me eventually being in a leadership role seemed realistic. I talked to the instructors as well as the cadet leaders about this possibility. I had ambitions to become a platoon leader, in which I could help plan events and activities with my platoon, company and battalion. I was beginning to realize that even though change can be hard, it can also lead to wonderful outcomes with the right attitude and perseverance. My attitude regarding change was beginning to transition from mostly negative to mostly positive.

At the start of my second year of JROTC, my senior year, I dove even further into leadership. My mentality was moving from follower to leader, and I felt good about that. One of the most important concepts I learned was mental agility. Mental agility has allowed me to open my mind to a broader view and be able to see how things are connected, which is a tool I use both in my academic and personal life. As the year continued, leadership positions were selected, and I was excited to earn the position of platoon leader! However, another change was about to happen due to unfortunate external circumstances. Cadet numbers and leadership roles were restructured, my platoon leader role was eliminated, and I was repositioned to the role of platoon sergeant. At this point, I could clearly see that my attitude towards change had evolved. Instead of being disappointed or upset about the change to the leadership role, I started thinking positively about what I could do as a platoon sergeant and how I could make a positive impact on other cadets. Mental agility, open communication, and maintaining an up-beat attitude definitely helped me navigate this change with ease.

As my senior year starts to come to an end, I reflect back on the last two years of my life. The leadership skills and tools that I have learned from JROTC have not only helped me in school, but also in my personal life. JROTC has taught me that I have much more leadership potential than I had ever imagined, and rather than dread change, I now embrace it. In fact, the somewhat timid, 16-year-old North Dakota boy that dreaded change just two short years ago, has now learned how to meet change head-on. I will be attending Northern Arizona University in the Fall of 2023 majoring in business. I look forward to this new challenge. JROTC has made a huge impact on me by teaching me lifelong leadership skills. I will always be thankful for the wonderful people I have met in the program and the knowledge and skills I have gained while being in JROTC. Change...it's not so scary after all!

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