



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

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“Nobody is born a leader,” a line that has been passed on from generation to generation. The act of being a good leader is cultivated through learning and experiencing. Some may argue that people are indeed born with some leadership instincts; however, without a proper foundation, a proper leader cannot be formed. Before I joined the MCJROTC program, I thought I was an exception. My parents were involved in the community through their involvement in an international Vietnamese Buddhist Youth Association known as GDPT. Both were exceptional leaders who held regional billets and taught the next generation of Vietnamese Buddhist Leaders. I thought I was in that case as I was taught the values of a leader since I was born. In reality, I was far from right.

I can still vividly remember the first day of school when a row of MCJROTC returners lined across the football field screaming, “HUSTLE UP, DON’T BE LATE TO CLASS.” I chuckled as I saw students run past me. Fortunately, I made it to class on time while walking and those who didn’t were immediately kicked out. The program got more serious for me after that point. The first year was when I learned the meaning of camaraderie and teamwork. I took on my first leadership position as the first squad leader where I encountered my first challenge: communication. I learned the hard way of trying to manage a group of cadets and ensuring they understand what I am saying and pushing out to them is not as easy as 123. As a

squad leader, I have to represent my whole squad by setting an example.

My sophomore year was my covid year when the program faced most of our challenges. Running the program online presented several issues from technology to maintaining a sense of routine. However, as a whole, we were able to adapt to the situation and make the best of it. On a cold Wednesday morning in January, we were hit with devastating news. Our Senior Marine Instructor had resigned. He was a father figure to most of the cadets, we came to him for anything and everything. Now, he is gone.

Junior year started abruptly. We waved our returners goodbye as they graduated in May going off into the world to do great things. Well, I waved to my computer monitor which had the live stream of the graduation. When the school year started, I was placed into a billet I was not prepared for: color guard commander. I was tasked with forming a color guard team from scratch with no guidance. My free time was spent flipping through the pages of drill manuals and constantly researching. My team practiced 5 days a week, 2 times a day, and an hour per practice. Then, during winter break, we received news that our only Marine Instructor has also resigned leaving us without an instructor. As a member of the company staff, we maintained treading water staying afloat until we found a replacement.

During the summer between my Junior and Senior year, I was presented with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to participate in an all-expense paid, 3-week leadership backpacking trip in Alaska. Our group of 12 rising seniors took a step into the wilderness and a large step outside of our comfort zone. During the course, I hiked 50 miles and gained 10,000 feet of elevation, and circumnavigated the Talkeetna Mountain range using a paper map. The instructors taught us the skills necessary to complete the course as well as leadership lessons, and from there on, everything was up to the students to lead the group to our pickup point. My instructors recognized me as a well competent leader due to my MCJROTC background and had to restrain me from helping the leader of the day. They even told me the MCJROTC over-prepared me for the course; however, I discovered what type of person and leader I am, and identified my biggest flaw, my altruism. I prioritized the well-being of my fellow teammates over myself. I did everything for them and not with them. One specific lesson taught me that a leader cannot lead if they cannot lead themselves.

As my senior year in high school comes to an end, it brings a lot of joy to reflect on how much I grew. Before entering the program I was allergic to change, the only “zone” I was ever in was either friend-zoned or my comfort zone. Let’s not talk about public speaking because I would stutter after every word. Now, I get an adrenaline rush when I am pushed out of my comfort zone and up on a stage giving a speech to a

large audience. I now see the discomfort zone as an area of growth. The program presented me with several challenges to overcome and the takeaway is to have the ability to tolerate adversities and uncertainties. We were uncertain of the direction the program was heading with no instructors, but we overcame that. I was placed into a leadership position with no guidance and tolerated the challenge and faced it head-on to create a well-regulated color guard team. Then, there was Alaska with its own challenges which the MCJROTC program helped me manage. Now, I have retired from Color Guard Commander and picked up Public Affairs to share the stories of Tolleson MCJROTC and inspire young cadets to strive when faced with adversities. I will take the lessons I learned in college with additional tutelage from the Navy ROTC Program. Thank you to the BBB and SPR for providing me an opportunity to give back to the program that inspired me to become a leader.

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