



What does leadership, character and service mean to you?

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I joined the Marine Corps Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (MCJROTC) at 15, unsure of the impact it would have on my life. Now, as I'm about to graduate and head to Barnard College of Columbia University in New York City, I can confidently say that MCJROTC has equipped me with invaluable life skills that will stay with me throughout my future. Although initially nervous about leaving my hometown in Arizona, looking back, I feel more than prepared for this next chapter. Through my time in MCJROTC, I've learned independence, the importance of community, and the value of perseverance—skills that will guide me as I pursue a career in science and medicine.

First and foremost, MCJROTC has taught me the power of independence and the constant pursuit of self-improvement. My decision to continue my education in New York City stems directly from the lessons I learned in the program. MCJROTC has consistently challenged me to seek personal growth, and my leadership journey is a testament to that. In my first year, I ended as the highest-ranking 1st-year cadet, achieving the rank of C/Corporal and becoming a squad leader. The following year, I was promoted to Platoon Sergeant and later to Company Gunnery Sergeant and Company First Sergeant, the highest enlisted rank in our unit at the time. In my final year, I advanced to Commanding Officer of the company, which is made up of 130 cadets. Through time

and experience, I grew significantly in my ability to lead and manage. Fifteen-year-old me would never have imagined standing in front of a large group to speak, let alone guide them through challenges. But now, I've developed the confidence and skills to be an effective public speaker, a problem-solver, and, most importantly, a decisive leader. These experiences have shaped me into someone who is ready for the independence and challenges of living in a fast-paced city like New York.

In addition to independence, MCJROTC has emphasized the importance of community and taking care of others and our own (aka, troop welfare). We are taught that the actions of one individual affect the whole group, and this lesson is something I carry with me every day. One example of this is during physical training (PT)—if one cadet forgets their PT sweater, everyone must take theirs off, regardless of the weather. Similar situations that demand unity taught me the value of selflessness and working together as a team. Beyond the program, I've had the opportunity to lead my company in over 3,000 hours of community service. We've cleaned up our city, supported local events, and participated in numerous parades and ceremonies. We prioritize helping our community and actually making an impact in our neighbors' lives. It's a mindset I plan to carry with me as I move forward, always prioritizing the

well-being of others and actively contributing to my community.

Finally, MCJROTC has instilled in me the power of adaptability and perseverance, especially when faced with challenges. In the Marine Corps there's a saying: Get comfortable with the uncomfortable. Throughout my involvement in the program, I see it more and more as I grow. The program emphasizes mission accomplishment, even when it takes you out of your comfort zone. For instance, when we travel with the program. I've traveled to Hawaii, Virginia, Maine, and New York, each time facing new situations that required me to adapt and grow as a leader. Whether it was navigating unfamiliar environments, maintaining morale, time management, or solving unexpected problems among cadets, I learned to approach each challenge with determination. These experiences have taught me that growth often comes from stepping into the unknown and pushing through adversity. This lesson has prepared me for the rigorous academic and personal challenges I'll face at Barnard College and beyond.

In conclusion, MCJROTC has provided me with essential life lessons about self-reliance, community, and resilience. These experiences have not only shaped the person I am today but have also built my confidence in the future ahead. I know that no matter what unexpected challenges arise, I am equipped to face them. My journey as a cadet has prepared me to grow further as a student, a leader, and a person, and I'm excited to take these lessons with me to Barnard and beyond.

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