

FIFTH PLACE RECIPIENT

Leadership, Integrity and Letting Go

Socorro Del Belén Robles Contreras HOLTVILLE HIGH SCHOOL

It was the first day of band camp, and the field sang with the sounds of the drums. The rhythm of mallets clacking the drumheads and the synchronized footsteps of the drumline always made me feel as if this was my second home. Even under the blazing heat of our small town, where it is always more than 100 degrees outside, we never stopped out practices. However, between all our melodies, one sound stood out. This was Javier, the new bass drummer who was struggling to keep up. Even though this was normal, because he was new, a group of older band members kept joking about how it sounded like he was fighting with his drum, and I could see how frustrated and discouraged he turned.

Being a second year band member meant I worked hard to get the experience I had as a lead bass drummer. I knew that the title was not guaranteed to stay forever, because I could lose it at any time. Since Javier and I were both in bass drums, we spent a lot of time practicing together. I then noticed how determined he was despite the criticism, so I started helping him. One morning while we were practicing, he told me how it had always been his dream to join band, but transportation held him back from participating. I told him that transportation was hard for me too because I traveled from Mexico everyday to go to school and rehearsals, so we both connected because we understood the commitment and sacrifice it meant to be in band.

Weeks passed and Javier improved significantly. One afternoon, my section leader told me that our band director was going to choose new leads for every instrument, and since Javier had improved so much in so little time, there was a possibility I would lose my position. That was the moment where for the first time, I questioned whether I should've kept helping him or stop, so he didn't improve more and I would keep my title of lead bass drum.

I thought about it for a while, and I realized that keeping my position was not more important than helping someone succeed. If I only helped people when it was convenient to me, that would mean my kindness depended on the outcome of my action rather than my morals, values, and what's right. I continued teaching Javier because I knew how difficult it was to be new in something like band, and how inspiring it is when someone believes in you, because I would have wanted someone to believe in me too when I was a new drummer.

Next week Javier was announced as the new lead bass drummer, and even though I was disappointed, I did not regret the help I gave him, and the support I showed him. He reminded me that a band is all about teamwork, trust, commitment, and supporting each other. Looking back, I realized that the most important thing was not to become a leader, but about how to make good ethical decisions even when my personal interests are in the line. Choosing what is easier for you is the easy path. Applying integrity means choosing what might help others, even if it needs a sacrifice. A true leader is not defined by their title; they are defined by the people they help along the way.